NATION

Even 0.001% negligence in NEET must be dealt with: SC

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BUSINESS

Markets continue record run as Sensex, Nifty climb

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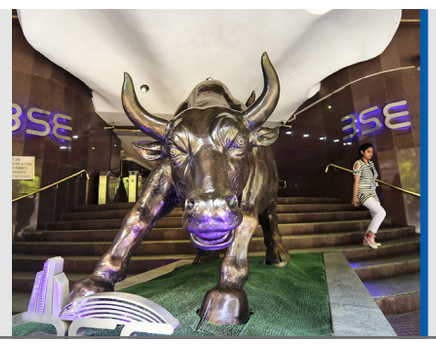

SPORTS

Gautam Gambhir is set to be named India's coach soon

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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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PM releases Rs 20,000 cr for 9.26 crore farmers

The direct benefit transfer will be done under PM-Kisan Yojana

VARANASI, 18 JUNE

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday released Rs 20,000 crore as part of the income support scheme for more than 9.26 crore farmers.

Modi released the amount during the PM Kisan Samman Sammelan in Varanasi. It was his first visit to his Lok Sabha constituency after assuming office as prime minister for the third consecutive term. After being sworn-in as prime minister, Modi signed his first file authorising the release of the 17th installment of the PM Kisan Samman Nidhi. He released the instalment under the scheme through direct benefit transfer.

Modi said, "We have to think about the global market. We have to become self-reliant in pulses and oilseeds and a leader in agricultural exports. Look, 'Langda' mango of Banaras, Jaunpur's radish, Ghazipur's lady finger, and many such products are reaching the foreign market today."

He said that with the 'one district one product' initiative and the formation of hubs at the district level, exports are increasing.

He also said production of 'zero defect' food items should be encouraged. Noting the presence of women in large numbers, Modi underlined their importance and support in agriculture and said, "Without mothers and sisters, it is impossible to imagine farming."

"Therefore, now the role of mothers and sisters is being expanded in giving a new direction to agriculture. Like Namo Drone Didi, the Krishi Sakhi programme is one such effort. We have seen the work of sisters as ASHA workers. We have seen the role of sisters as bank sakhis. Now we will see agriculture getting new strength in the form of Krishi Sakhi," he said. —*PTI*

> **Today again the headlines scream that the 'one-third' Pradhan Mantri will release the 17th instalment of PM Kisan. This is how headlines keep getting recycled. The non-biological Prime Minister is not bestowing some prasad on kisaans. It is their legitimate right and entitlement**
>
> -Jairam Ramesh, Congress General Secretary

Ganga has adopted me: PM at 1st Varanasi visit post polls

VARANASI, 18 JUNE

Visiting his Varanasi constituency which elected him to Lok Sabha for a third consecutive time, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday said it appears that mother Ganga has now adopted him. Addressing a PM Kisan Samman Sammelan, he said the mandate given by the people in this Lok Sabha election is truly unprecedented and has created history.

"I consider farmers, women, the youth and the poor strong pillars of 'Viksit Bharat' (developed India)," Modi said on his first visit to his constituency after the Lok Sabha polls and added that the first decision of the new government related to farmers and the poor.

He won from Varanasi with a reduced margin of 1,52,513 votes. "The people of Varanasi have not only chosen me as MP for a third time but also as prime minister," Modi said at the event where he released the Rs 20,000-crore 17th instalment of the PM-Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KSN) for more than 9.26 crore farmers. After being sworn-in as prime minister, Modi signed his first file authorising the release of this installment of the scheme. —*PTI*

Prime Minister Narendra Modi attends 'Ganga Pujan' at Dashashwamedh Ghat, in Varanasi, on Tuesday **PHOTO: PTI**

BRIDGE FALLS BEFORE OPENING

A newly-constructed bridge collapsed in Bihar's Araria on Tuesday day before its inauguration. No casualties were reported. The estimated cost of the bridge was Rs 12 crore. The bridge was constructed to ease the commute between Kursakanta and Sikti on Bakra River. This is the second bridge collapse in a year in Bihar **PHOTO: PTI**

Balasore communal clash: Curfew on, internet suspended

BALASORE, 18 JUNE

Odisha government suspended internet services in Balasore town for 48 hours and extended curfew indefinitely following a communal clash between two groups that left 10 people injured on Monday.

The conflict initially arose in Bhujakhia Pir area reportedly over alleged animal slaughter and blood on the road.

Balasore SP Sagarika Nath urged residents to stay indoors during the curfew period, emphasising that seven FIRs have been filed and 34 people detained on charges related to rioting since Monday.

To maintain law and order, over 40 platoons of police personnel have been deployed, particularly in areas where the administration suspected possible flare-ups. All six entry and exit points to the town sealed off, the SP said. Flag marches were also conducted in the sensitive areas of the town.

Exceptions will be made for those needing to travel for exams or in cases of medical emergencies, provided they can produce necessary documentation, she said.

According to an official, the decision to suspend internet for 48 hours was taken to prevent dissemination of provocative messages that could exacerbate communal tensions.

Deputy CM KV Singh Deo said, "Chief Secretary and DGP are monitoring the situation in Balasore and apprising the CM on the matter. We appeal to all to maintain peace." Balasore MLA Manas Dutta has appealed to people not to believe in rumours and fake posts in social media. "Old photos are being posted in the name of the recent violence in Balasore. I appeal to people not to get swayed by such rumours. The government is taking all steps to restore peace." —*PTI*

NIA arrests Sirsi man with alleged LeT link

KARWAR, 18 JUNE

National Investigation Agency (NIA) arrested a 32-year-old man at Sirsi in Uttara Kannada district on Tuesday for his alleged connection with a terrorist organisation. Abdul Shukkur, a native of Banavasi, is suspected of being a member of the banned Popular Front of India. Early on Tuesday morning, a team comprising five NIA officers, along with State intelligence officers, carried out the raid. Shukkur has been accused of instigating Rameswaram Cafe blast and cooker bomb blast in Mangaluru, and also allegedly instigating suspects in bomb blasts at Shivamogga mosque and surrounding areas. Shukkur, who had been working in Dubai, returned to his residence in Dasana Koppa to celebrate Bakrid. It was during this period that NIA launched its investigation based on suspicions of Shukkur providing fake documents for his passport and maintaining online contact with a terrorist organisation. —*Salar News*

'Challenging Star' Darshan faces new challenge with manager's death

BENGALURU, 18 JUNE

The former manager of Kannada actor Darshan Thoogudeepa's has allegedly died by suicide at a farmhouse of the actor in Bengaluru. However, **Salar News** could not confirm the time of the manager's death.

Karnataka police found a hand-written suicide note and a video of it. The deceased manager, Sridhar, in his suicide note, stated that he was going through loneliness and neither his family nor his friends were responsible for his death.

Darshan **PHOTO: ANI**

Police are investigating the potential links between the Renukaswamy murder case and the manager's suicide.

Popularly known as the 'challenging star' of the Sandalwood industry, Darshan Thoogudeepa was apprehended in connection with the murder of his fan Renukaswamy. Currently, the investigation into the matter suggests that Darshan allegedly devised a scheme with his supporters to kidnap, torture, and kill Renukaswamy after the latter sent offensive messages to Darshan's girlfriend, actress Pavithra Gowda. —*Salar News*

Govt approved Sandur mining, not me, says HDK

BENGALURU, 18 JUNE

Union Minister for Steel and Heavy Industries HD Kumaraswamy claimed that he was not the one who decided to allow mining in about 404 hectares of forest area in Sandur in Ballari district in Karnataka, and that the State government had approved the project much earlier, on Tuesday. He was reacting to reports expressing concerns that 99,000 trees would be felled if the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Limited (KIOCL) is permitted to mine iron ore in Devadari forest area of Sandur taluk. The union minister had recently given his approval to KIOCL to operationalise the Devadari Iron Ore Mine. Noting that the Devadari project is on Prime Minister's 100-day agenda, Kumaraswamy instructed officials to work diligently in this regard.

Kumaraswamy, who held a meeting with KIOCL officers, claimed there is "no need to worry" about the mining project, as KIOCL will plant an "alternative" forest in an area of 808 hectares at a cost of around Rs 194 crore before starting the ore extraction work. The minister said that the forest department has been paid for it. He also claimed that "all precautionary measures have been taken so as not to disturb the biodiversity."—*PTI*

KANCHENJUNGA TRAIN ACCIDENT

Passenger files complaint against loco, co-loco pilots

DARJEELING, 18 JUNE

A passenger, who was travelling on the Kanchenjunga Express at the time of the accident on 17 June, filed a complaint against the loco pilot and co-loco pilot of the goods train. A goods train allegedly disregarded a signal and hit the Sealdah-bound Kanchanjungha Express near North Bengal's Jalpaiguri station at 8.55am on Monday. The accident took place in the Phansidewa area of Darjeeling district. At least 10 people died and over 25 people were injured in the accident.

The passenger, identified as Chinmoy Majumdar, mentioned in her complaint that while the train was moving suddenly a jerk was felt, creating a panicky atmosphere. She and some co-passengers have also sustained injuries.

"After coming down from the train, she found that one goods train hit the Kanchenjunga Express from the back side after which some portion was badly damaged including the engine of the goods train.

The accident happened due to rush and negligent conduct of the loco pilot and co-loco pilot," the complaint further said.

Dr Sandeep Kumar Sengupta, Dean of North Bengal Medical College and Hospital confirmed on Tuesday that the death toll in the mishap has increased to 10 after two more deaths were reported today.

The Indian Youth Congress held a candle march here on Tuesday in memory of the passengers killed in the accident. The employees' unions said that squarely blaming the driver, who is not alive to defend himself, amounts to making him a scapegoat of the systematic shortcomings of the Railways. —*PTI*

PHOTO: X/ @MBPATIL

Muralitharan to invest Rs 1,400 cr in K'taka beverage unit

BENGALURU, 18 JUNE

Sri Lanka cricket legend Muttiah Muralitharan will invest a total of Rs 1,400 crore in phases to establish a beverages (soft drinks) and confectionery unit in Badanaguppe in Chamarajanagara district, according to Karnataka Large and Medium Industries Minister MB Patil on Tuesday. The announcement came after Patil held discussions with Muralitharan, who met him to discuss the project. In a statement by the Minister's office, Patil said the former Sri Lanka cricketer Muralitharan plans to manufacture beverages and confectioneries under the brand "Muttiah Beverages and Confectioneries." The project, initially planned with an investment of Rs 230 crore, has now been revised to a total of Rs 1,000 crore. It will be further increased to Rs 1,400 crore in a few years, he said. The minister also noted that 46 acres of land have already been allocated for the project and manufacturing operations are expected to begin in January 2025. —*PTI*

41 airports in India get hoax bomb threats

NEW DELHI, 18 JUNE

Forty-one airports in the country received bomb threat emails and each of them was declared a hoax following anti-sabotage checks by security agencies that lasted for hours, official sources said, on Tuesday.

The emails were received at the airports around 12.40pm from the email id exhumedyou888@gmail.com. The airports scrambled contingency measures, carried out anti-sabotage checks and swept the terminals following the respective Bomb Threat Assessment Committee recommendations, the sources told PTI. An online group called "KNR" is suspected to be behind these hoax threat emails. The group reportedly issued similar emails to several schools in the Delhi-NCR on 1 May, they said. The emails received by the airports carried almost the identical message: "Hello, there are explosives hidden in the Airport. The bombs will soon explode. You will all die."The airports put into action contingency plans and carried out anti-sabotage checks following recommendations of their respective Bomb Threat Assessment Committees, the sources said. At the Chennai airport, a Dubai-bound flight with 286 passengers was delayed as a result of the hoax threat.

PHOTO: PTI

Security agencies conducted a thorough search of the flight but found nothing suspicious. —*PTI*

BJP-JD(S) won more seats in K'taka due to EVMs: DKS

BENGALURU, 18 JUNE

Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar alleged electronic voting machines were behind BJP-JD(S) alliance winning more Lok Sabha seats in the State and called for an investigation into the functioning of EVMs, on Tuesday.

He even demanded that EVMs be replaced with ballot boxes.

"EVMs have played a role in BJP-JD(S) securing higher than expected seats in Karnataka. EVMs must go. Ballot boxes must return. The results must be investigated," the senior Congress leader said.

When ballot boxes were there, Congress used to get two-thirds of the votes in Madhya Pradesh but the situation has changed now, he claimed.

In the recently concluded Lok Sabha elections, BJP and its ally JD(S) won 17 and two seats respectively, while the ruling Congress in Karnataka got nine seats.

Replying to a query, he said the City civic body elections will be held soon. —*PTI*

FAMILIES IN AGREEMENT

Rape accused gets bail to marry survivor

BENGALURU, 18 JUNE

The Karnataka High Court has granted a 23-year-old man charged with the rape of a girl when she was 16 years and nine months of age, 15-day bail to marry her.

The families of both parties are in favour of the marriage, especially since the girl, who recently turned 18, has given birth to a child. DNA tests have confirmed that the man charged with the rape is the child's biological father. The court has ordered the petitioner, who must return to custody on the evening of July 3, to provide a marriage certificate at the next hearing on July 4. The court said its decision aims to protect the interests of the child and support the young mother.

The families of both parties are in favour of the marriage **PHOTO: PTI**

Justice M Nagaprasanna issued the interim order dated last Saturday in response to a petition from the accused, seeking to dismiss the charges as both families wish to proceed with the wedding. The accused, who hails from Mysuru district, was arrested in February 2023 following allegations by the girl's mother that he repeatedly sexually assaulted her daughter, who was then 16 years and nine months old. —*PTI*

Transport Min asks Lokayukta to raid Karnataka Bhavan

BENGALURU, 18 JUNE

Transport Minister Ramalinga Reddy has ordered Lokayukta to investigate the allegations that the work done to build Karnataka Bhavan, Ballari was poor, on Tuesday. The minister wrote a letter to the principal secretary of the revenue department, Mujrai division, stating that the necessary actions must be taken against the officials responsible for the poor workmanship and the case needs to be handed over to Lokayukta. Karnataka Bhavan that was built for the convenience of the devotees going to Mantralaya has 100 rooms and was constructed on Rs 5 crore budget. There was an allegation that the workmanship of the place was poor and there were cracked walls, leaking rooms and messed up electrical connections. After all these complaints were raised Reddy has taken a step to look into these allegations and bring the poor workmanship to light. *—Salar News*

Student kills self over losing money to investment app

BENGALURU, 18 JUNE

A 21-year-old final-year student from Mahalakshmi Ammani College (MLAC) was found hanging from a ceiling fan on Sunday by the hostel warden at midnight. The police found a suicide note in her phone as a screen saver where she blamed herself for the suicide. The victim, MS Shruthi hailed from Kolar and was doing her final year in MLAC. The post-mortem was conducted at Bowring Hospital, and her mortal remains were handed over to her parents. Shekhar H, Deputy Commissioner of Police, Central, said, "The mother of the girl had invested some money and the girl had lost it and that is why she committed suicide." The suicide note is still being examined by the forensic department. When asked about the app that the girl used to invest money the police said that the name of the app was still under verification. *—Salar News*

PHOTO: SALAR

Elephant dies in Kodagu after falling into well

MADIKERI, 18 JUNE

A wild elephant died after falling into an open well in Palangala village, in Virajpet taluk of Kodagu district. The incident occurred on Monday at around 11pm. The well, which was constructed under the Employment Guarantee Scheme, is situated in front of Biddappa Shambu's house in Palangala. The local authorities and residents were alerted to the mishap following the incident. The forest department informed us that the elephant is aged about 18 years. A case also has been registered. *—Salar News*

HC grants anticipatory bail to Bhavani

She is accused of abducting a woman allegedly raped by her son

BENGALURU, 18 JUNE

Karnataka High Court on Tuesday granted anticipatory bail to Bhavani Revanna, mother of former JD(S) MP and rape accused Prajwal Revanna, in a kidnapping case involving one of the victims of her son's sexual assaults.

The prosecution said Bhavani is the 'kingpin' who is the mastermind of the kidnapping and she is trying to protect her son. The Court dismissed the SIT's argument that she had given misleading answers. The Court emphasised that Bhavani had already answered 85 questions during the investigation, making it unfair to claim she was not cooperating with the Special Investigation Team (SIT), which is probing sexual abuse cases against Prajwal.

Bhavani Revanna **PHOTO: FB**

The SIT had sought her custody in connection with the kidnapping of a house-help in KR Nagar in Mysuru district, after she failed to attend questioning. Justice Krishna S Dixit, while allowing Bhavani's petition seeking anticipatory bail, urged that media trials be avoided and underlined the importance of not making unnecessary arrests of women, noting their central role in families.

- The prosecution said Bhavani is the 'kingpin' who is the mastermind of the kidnapping and she is trying to protect her son. The Court dismissed the SIT's argument that she had given misleading answers

The judge also highlighted that the allegations of non-cooperation were unconvincing since Bhavani had already provided extensive responses during her interrogation.

On 7 June, the court had granted interim anticipatory bail to Bhavani with conditions preventing her from entering Mysuru and Hassan districts, and it was then extended on 14 June.

In addition to earlier conditions, the Court on Tuesday permitted the SIT to take her to Hassan and Mysuru districts for their investigation. Bhavani is accused of trying to prevent the woman, who was allegedly sexually assaulted by Prajwal, from filing a complaint. *—PTI*

Prajwal in judicial custody till 24 June

BENGALURU, 18 JUNE

A special court here on Tuesday remanded former JD(S) MP Prajwal Revanna, who is facing charges of rape and sexual abuse, to judicial custody till 24 June.

The 42nd Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate court had on 12 June remanded him to the custody of the Special Investigation Team (SIT), which is probing the cases against him, till June 18.

The 33-year-old had failed in his bid to retain the Hassan parliamentary constituency in the recent polls. SIT officials arrested Revanna soon after he landed at Bengaluru airport from Germany on 31 May.

He had left for Germany on 27 April, a day after Hassan went to the polls. A 'Blue Corner Notice' seeking information on his whereabouts had earlier been issued by the Interpol, following a request by the SIT via the Central Bureau of Investigation.

Revanna was arrested in a case registered against him in Holenarasipura in Hassan district on April 28. He was accused of sexually harassing a 47-year-old former maid. He has been booked in three cases of sexual assault. There are also charges of rape against him. *—PTI*

Taluks to be allotted ₹1 lakh to celebrate Kempegowda Jayanti

BENGALURU, 18 JUNE

State government will allot Rs 1 lakh to every taluk in State to celebrate the birth anniversary of Bengaluru founder Kempegowda on 27 June, Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar said on Tuesday.

"An action plan has been prepared to develop Kempegowda's fort and burial place in Devanahalli to transform them into tourist destinations. Ten acres was allotted for developing Kempegowda's birthplace in Devanahalli and five acres was designated for setting up a Kempegowda Authority office at Summanahalli, with a foundation ceremony planned on Jayanti," Shivakumar said.

Additionally, Rs 1 lakh will be provided to Constituency Education Officers to organise seminars about Kempegowda for students across the state." Debates on Kempegowda will be organised for school children, with Rs 20,000 allocated for cultural events at taluks, he said. District centres will receive Rs 50,000, with considerations for additional funding.

The 515th Jayanthotsav of Nadaprabhu Kempegowda is scheduled at Palace Grounds on 27 June and processions will held in various parts of Bengaluru, including Huliyurdurga, Magadi, and Avathi. *—Salar News*

Mandya's Mysugar Factory to re-open on 23 June

MANDYA, 18 JUNE

Mysugar Factory in Mandya, the only government-owned sugar factory in Karnataka, will begin crushing operations on 23 June, marking the commencement of this year's milling activities It stands as a critical pillar for the livelihood of farmers in the district. It has faced significant challenges, including outdated machinery and periods of closure due to financial losses. Last year, the factory was reopened following government intervention and compensation measures, resulting in the successful milling of four lakh tonnes of sugarcane. *—Salar News*

RENUKASWAMY MURDER CASE

BJP State President BY Vijayendra meets Renukaswamy's family on Tuesday **PHOTO: SALAR**

BJP seeks job, ex-gratia for Renukaswamy's wife

CHITRADURGA, 18 JUNE

BJP Karnataka unit delegation, led by its State President BY Vijayendra, on Tuesday met the family of Renukaswamy, in whose murder case Kannada actor Darshan Thoogudeepa is an accused, and urged the government to provide compensation to them and a government job to victim's wife.

They sought a fair probe into his murder and demanded that the guilty be punished. From the party Rs 2 lakh was given to the family of Renukaswamy, who was tortured and killed in Bengaluru recently.

A total 17 people including Darshan and his friend Pavithra Gowda are accused in the murder case.

"Renukaswamy's murder is inhuman and no one in the civilised society can support it. Every one has to condemn this incident in the strongest terms. This heinous murder is being discussed not only in the state but nationally," Vijayendra said.

Speaking to reporters here after meeting the family members, he urged the Chief Minister Siddaramaiah to instill courage in the family, give compensation and a government job to his wife, who is four months pregnant.

"Investigation is going on, it is known to everyone as to who all are involved, but the investigation has to be done properly, without budging under any pressure. The investigation has to happen without losing track, and the guilty and the murderers should be punished," he added.

Darshan, popularly known as "Challenging Star", and 12 of his close associates were arrested last Tuesday for the murder of 33-year-old Renukaswamy, a fan of the actor. *—PTI*

WILL PUNISH THE ACCUSED, SAYS TOP COP

BENGALURU, 18 JUNE

Bengaluru City Police Commissioner B Dayananda on Tuesday said the police will ensure that the accused involved in the Renukaswamy murder case are punished and justice is delivered to the victim's family.

The police have so far arrested 17 people, including Kannada actor Darshan Thoogudeepa and his friend Pavithra Gowda, in connection with the recent murder. Renukaswamy, a fan of Darshan, had allegedly sent some obscene messages to Gowda on social media, which infuriated the 47-year-old actor, according to police sources.Addressing a press conference here, Dayananda said the police have taken swift and timely action in the case. If there was even a bit of carelessness or delay in the probe, the investigation would have been hampered. But the police personnel did their job with dedication and gathered all information and evidence. Because of the quick investigation, the entire matter came to light, he said. Karnataka Home Minister G Parameshwara said there was no need to hand over the case to the CBI. *—PTI*

Political tensions flare in Davangere after BJP lost in polls

DAVANGERE, 18 JUNE

After the Lok Sabha election results were out, infighting started in BJP district unit of Davangere where the party candidate Gayathri Siddeshwara lost to Congress' Prabha Mallikarjun. BJP MLA Harish had alleged that the party's work during elections was compromised.

Former MLA MP Renukacharya, former minister SA Ravindranath and party leader Madal Mallikarjun have countered Harish's accusations. "We worked sincerely under the leadership of Ravindranath in Lok Sabha elections; however, some have blamed us unjustly," he said.

- Madal Mallikarjun, son of former Channagiri MLA Madal Virupakshappa, labelled Harish as a criminal and accused him of losing his mental composure

Renukacharya said in Harish's constituency, Congress received more votes than expected, highlighting the presence of former JDS MLA HS Shivashankar as a factor.Ravindranath advised calm and resilience among the party workers in the face of electoral defeat. "Winning four times and losing once is part of the political journey. It's essential to stay composed and not resort to blame games," he said.

Madal Mallikarjun, son of former Channagiri MLA Madal Virupakshappa, labelled Harish as a criminal and accused him of losing his mental composure. Mallikarjun defended his father against corruption allegations, stating that the court had cleared the case against him. He opposed Harish's criticisms of his family, urging Harish to concentrate on serving his constituents rather than making derogatory remarks. *—Salar News*

By-election to 1 Legislative Council seat on 12 July

BENGALURU, 18 JUNE

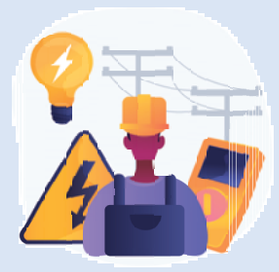
By-election to one seat of Karnataka Legislative Council, that was vacated by former chief minister and now Member of Parliament Jagadish Shettar, will be held on 12 July, poll officials said on Tuesday.

The seat fell vacant as Shettar resigned from the MLC seat (elected by Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA)) on 24 January. His term was supposed to end in June 2028.

The 68-year-old former State BJP President had quit the the party to join the Congress ahead of the state assembly polls last year after being denied the ticket.

Thereafter, the Congress had made Shettar the MLC. However, he returned to BJP in January after quitting as MLC, and successfully contested the Lok Sabha polls on the saffron party ticket, and is now an MP from Belgaum Lok Sabha segment.

Notification for this by-poll will be issued on June 25, and the last date for filing nominations is July two. Scrutiny of nominations will take place on July three and the last date for withdrawal of candidature is July five. *—PTI*



City to see scheduled power cuts tomorrow

BENGALURU, 18 JUNE

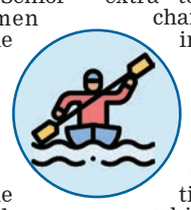
Bengaluru is set to witness scheduled power cuts in multiple areas on Thursday. According to a press release by Karnataka Power Transmission Corporation there will be power cuts in Austin Town, Richmond Road, Silver Lake Apartment, Trinity Circle, MG Road, Vijaya Bank, Brigade Road, Castle Street, Tata Lane, Udaya TV, ITC, Four Season Apartment, KSRP, Ratna Avenue, Hayes Road, Residency Road, St Marks Road, Lavelle Road, Brigade Road, Vittal Malya Road, Wood Street, Magrath Road, Richmond Circle, Embassy, Brunton Road and other areas due to maintenance conduction from 10 am to 3pm.

—Salar News

State to host 1st national kayaking championship

BENGALURU, 18 JUNE

The State will host its first three-day national championship of kayaking and canoeing on the Kali River in Dandeli, from 19 June to 21 June. This event will feature the 12th National Canoe Slalom Senior Men & Women Championship and the 11th National Canoe Slalom Junior Men & Women Championship.



A total of 118 kayaking and canoeing players from across the nation, including 28 players from Karnataka, will participate in the championships. The State government sports authority has sanctioned Rs 8 lakh for this event, with additional support from the General Thimmaya Academy, the Karnataka Olympic Association, and the Karnataka Kayaking and Canoeing Association.

Speaking to Salar News, Captain Dilip Kumar, Secretary of the Karnataka Kayaking and Canoeing Association, said, "We are contributing nearly Rs 7 lakh extra to accommodate the championship." This is in addition to the amount allotted by the government. He said precautionary measures are also in place, including rescue teams and essential equipment such as whistles, bilge pumps, communication devices, and other safety gear. Around 25-30 local volunteers have also come forward to assist.

"Karnataka has added free accommodation and free food for all players and coaches," Kumar said. The finals will be held on Friday. *—Salar News*

AMID HIGH FUEL PRICES

Bus corporations demand hike in fares

BENGALURU, 18 JUNE

Four State bus corporations Bengaluru Metropolitan Transport Corporation (BMTC), Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC), Northwest Road Transport Corporation (NWRTC) and Kalyan Karnataka Transport Corporation (KKRTC) have proposed a 25 per cent increase in KSRTC bus fares.

A senior KSRTC official told **Salar News** that 45 per cent of KSRTC's revenue now being spent on diesel. He said the corporation's diesel expenditure has increased from Rs 3 crore to Rs 5 crore. Diesel cost Rs 86. 28 per litre last month but now costs Rs 88.94. Petrol cost Rs 100.21 per litre last month and now it is Rs 103.44.

The transport Corporations hopes that the government will approve at least a 12 per cent hike. The top officials from the KSRTC confirmed **Salar News** that it is very difficult to manage the costs of the bus maintenance.

Bus corporations want 25 per cent increase in bus fares **PHOTO: PTI**

KSRTC saw a rise of Rs 3,930 crore in six months compared to the revenue of Rs 3,349 crore in 2022-2023 but KSRTC claims that 50 per cent of this revenue is used only for diesel.

Transport Minister Ramalinga Reddy's office told **Salar News**, "We are planning to have a meeting about the price hike and I have notified the department to give me a detailed list of estimated costs to analyse the requirement of the price hike."However, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Tuesday said there will be no fare hike-for now. The State currently has 24.48 lakh buses.

Unlike the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI), which annually adjusts toll prices based on the Wholesale Price Index (WPI), KSRTC demands its own formula for fare adjustments. The official noted that with a 20 per cent increase in employee salaries and a 46 per cent rise in diesel and spare parts costs, a 40 per cent fare increase is necessary to avoid losses.The corporation typically receives budget grants for new buses, employee salary increases, and additional bus station construction. However, since the implementation of the Shakti scheme, the State government has not provided any grants, forcing KSRTC to rely solely on its revenue. *—Salar News*

Modi's 'Mann Ki Baat' to resume from 30 June

NEW DELHI, 18 JUNE

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday said his 'Mann Ki Baat' monthly radio broadcast will resume from 30 June and urged people to share their ideas and inputs for it. "Delighted to share that after a gap of some months due to the elections, #MannKiBaat is back! This month's programme will take place on 30 June, Sunday," he said in a post on X. "I call upon all of you to share your ideas and inputs for the same. Write on the MyGov Open Forum, NaMo App or record your message on 1800 11 7800," Modi said. Modi's monthly 'Mann Ki Baat' broadcast was last aired on 25 February and then took a break for the Lok Sabha polls Meanwhile, the main International Day of Yoga celebrations this year will be held at Sher-i-Kashmir International Conference Centre (SKICC) in Srinagar on 21 June with Modi leading the event. *—PTI*

Himanta reshuffles cabinet, takes over health dept

GUWAHATI, 18 JUNE

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma made a minor reshuffle in his cabinet on Tuesday and took charge of the Health and Family Welfare Department. The Health portfolio was earlier held by Keshab Mahanta, who has been reallocated departments held by former minister Parimal Suklabaidya following his election to the Lok Sabha. Mahanta, a member of BJP's alliance partner Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), had held the position since 2021, according to an official notification. Mahanta has been reallocated the departments of Transport, Excise, and Fisheries, which were held by Suklabaidya, in addition to his earlier portfolios of Science, Technology and Climate Change, and Information Technology. *—PTI*

Chargesheet likely against Arundhati Roy next week

NEW DELHI, 18 JUNE

Delhi Police is likely to file a chargesheet next week in a case registered against author Arundhati Roy and a former professor in Kashmir under the stringent Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act for their alleged provocative speeches in 2010, official sources said on Tuesday. Roy and former Central University of Kashmir professor Sheikh Showkat Hussain were booked for allegedly delivering inflammatory speeches at a conference organised under the banner of 'Azadi - The Only Way' at LTG Auditorium, Copernicus Marg on 21 October, 2010. The FIR was registered at Tilak Marg Police Station on a complaint made by Sushil Pandit, a social activist from Kashmir. According to official sources, over a thousand-page charge sheet has been prepared by the Crime Branch in which Roy and Hussain on the basis of several videos and forensic evidence. *—PTI*

RaGa's defamation case hearing on 26 June

SULTANPUR, 18 JUNE

The hearing in the defamation case against Congress leader Rahul Gandhi over his alleged objectionable remarks against Union Home Minister Amit Shah was on Tuesday fixed for 26 June as the concerned judge was on leave. The case related to Gandhi allegedly making objectionable comments against Shah is going on in the MP/MLA court. The defamation complaint against Gandhi was filed by BJP leader Vijay Mishra. Santosh Kumar Pandey, the plaintiff's lawyer, said that the matter was listed to be heard on Tuesday but due to the judge of the concerned court being on leave it has been postponed to June 26. The concerned court judge Shubham Verma had on 7 June fixed 18 June as the date for hearing the above case. *—PTI*

Jagan Mohan backs paper ballots

He says advance democracies don't use EVMs

AMARAVATI, 18 JUNE

YSRCP supremo YS Jagan Mohan Reddy on Tuesday called for paper ballots to replace Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) in elections.

Following a humiliating electoral debacle in the recently held Assembly and Lok Sabha polls in Andhra Pradesh, the former chief minister claimed that almost every advanced democracy uses paper ballots.

"In electoral practices across the world in almost every advanced democracy, paper ballots are used, not EVMs," Reddy said in a post on 'X'.

To uphold the true spirit of our (India) democracy, the Andhra Pradesh opposition leader opined that 'we too must move towards the same (postal ballots)'.

"Just as justice should not only be served, but should also appear to have been served, so should democracy not only prevail but must appear to be prevalent undoubtedly," he added.

Several opposition leaders are raising questions about the EVMs and pressing about using ballot papers instead in the electoral process.

Maharashtra Congress President Nana Patole on Monday said that ballot papers must replace EVMs and emphasised that Congress has been constantly raising the demand for ballot papers but the centre has shown reluctance.

YS Jagan Mohan Reddy *PHOTO:PTI*

"Voting is our fundamental right. There is a question in front of people if their vote gets delivered in favour of the candidate whom they cast their vote for. Why doesn't the central government use ballot paper for voting?" Patole pointed out.

"The developed countries including the US and Japan have been practicing voting on a ballot paper.

Then why not in India? Congress has been asking the same question repeatedly," Patole said.

YSRCP was relegated to just 11 Assembly and four Lok Sabha seats in the recently concluded simultaneous elections in Andhra Pradesh.

NDA comprising TDP, BJP and Janasena won a landslide victory by securing 164 Assembly seats out of 175. Of the 25 Lok Sabha seats, the alliance got 21 seats. *—PTI*

TDP says Jagan building 'Palace on Hill'

A beautiful palace in Vishakhapatnam built in secrecy behind giant barricades on top of a hill came under fire on Sunday. Telegu Desam Party (TDP) claimed that the property on Rashikonda hills was used as a camp office for YSRCP Chief Jagan Mohan Reddy.

Spread across 9.88-acre sea-facing site, the palace was allegedly built using public funds with luxurious amenities, high-quality furnishing.

TOUGH DEBUT?

CPI to field candidate against Priyanka Gandhi in Wayanad

T'PURAM, 18 JUNE

CPI on Tuesday said that it will field a candidate against Priyanka Gandhi Vadra in the Wayanad Lok Sabha by-poll.

CPI holds Wayanad Lok Sabha seat in the Left Democratic Front (LDF) and its candidate would contest in the by-election, CPI state secretary Binoy Viswam told reporters.

"What is doubt in it? CPI and LDF will not do anything that is favourable to BJP. So, we will certainly field our candidate there," he said.

The Left leader also said if Congress party's plan was to vacate Wayanad, there was no need for them to bring a prominent leader like Rahul Gandhi to the south.

CPI's Annie Raja, who had contested against Rahul Gandhi in the recently held Lok Sabha polls, said a decision on her candidature will be taken by the party leadership.

"UDF announced a woman candidate, I welcome that. But I had raised this question when Rahul Gandhi contested, I am asking this question to Priyanka Gandhi today with all due respect... for you and your party, who is your biggest enemy? Is it communal-fascist forces or the Left parties?" she said. *—PTI*

BJP continues to take jibe at Priyanka's candidature

T'PURAM, 18 JUNE

BJP in Kerala on Tuesday continued to mock the Congress party's decision to field Priyanka Gandhi in Wayanad, which was vacated by Rahul Gandhi, and said the grand old party may consider her husband Robert Vadra in the upcoming by-poll in Palakkad assembly segment.

BJP state chief K Surendran and senior leader V Muraleedharan criticised Congress leadership over their decision and alleged that they had cheated the people of Wayanad.

Surendran said, it is once again proven beyond doubt that Congress is the only "tool" for the so-called Nehru-Gandhi family to serve their family's interests. In a post on 'X', he said: "@RahulGandhi claimed that Wayanad is his family.

Priyanka Gandhi *PHOTO:PTI*

Now he has decided the candidature of his own sister @priyankagandhi to the upcoming by-election in Wayanad. Hope that Rahul will field his brother-in-law @irobertvadra in the Palakkad by-election. However, senior Congress leader VD Satheesan rejected the criticism of political opponents against Priyanka Gandhi's arrival in Wayanad and said not just Wayanad but the entire state of Kerala would embrace her to their hearts. *—PTI*

I think right now, by winning in Wayanad, which she should do comfortably I believe, she is going to bring a very strong voice to the Parliament. She is one of the most impressive speakers and campaigners we have got and to have her in the Lok Sabha would be a huge asset to the party

- Shashi Tharoor, Congress MP

Shashi Tharoor *PHOTO:PTI*

MEET SEBI OFFICIALS

NCP (Sharadchandra Pawar) chief Sharad Pawar with party MPs Supriya Sule and Arvind Sawant during a meeting with TMC MPs Kalyan Banerjee, Sagarika Ghosh, and Saket Gokhale, and SEBI officials *PHOTO: PTI*

Pawar, TMC MPs seek probe into stock mkt manipulation

MUMBAI, 18 JUNE

A delegation of Trinamool Congress MPs met officials of the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) here on Tuesday and demanded a probe into the alleged stock market manipulation following exit polls earlier this month.

The delegation, comprising TMC MPs Kalyan Banerjee, Sagarika Ghose and Saket Gokhale, was joined by Shiv Sena (UBT) MP Arvind Sawant and former NCP (SP) MLC Vidya Chavan.

Notably, Congress MP Rahul Gandhi had alleged that Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah were "directly involved" in what he described as the "biggest stock market scam" with retail investors losing Rs 30 lakh crore due to the market crashing after the Lok Sabha poll result earlier this month.

BJP has dismissed his charges as "baseless".

West Bengal Chief Minister and Trinamool Congress (TMC) head Mamata Banerjee has demanded an investigation into how stock markets were "manipulated by using fake exit polls".

After the meeting, Kalyan Banerjee told reporters, "SEBI had a glorious role in the past. We have confidence in SEBI which is why we are seeking an investigation into the manipulation of the stock market by the reason of misleading exit polls for the Lok Sabha elections 2024."

He said the delegation also demanded a probe into whether exit poll agencies have any connection with political leaders.

On 3 June, the share market rose, but it crashed a day later. In 24 hours, small investors lost Rs 30 lakh crore, MP claimed, adding that families of politicians have earned crores due to this. *—PTI*

CPI(M)'s Radhakrishnan resigns, bans 'colony' word

T'PURAM, 18 JUNE

Senior CPI(M) leader K Radhakrishnan, the lone LDF candidate to emerge victorious from Kerala in the recent Lok Sabha polls, on Tuesday resigned as state Minister.

He quit as the Kerala Minister for Devaswom and Welfare of SC, ST and Backward Classes and Parliamentary Affairs after winning from Alathur constituency and is expected to go to New Delhi later this month, sources said.

A central committee member of the CPI(M), Radhakrishnan handed over the resignation letter to Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan at his official residence.

After handing over his resignation, Radhakrishnan told reporters that he was stepping down with great satisfaction.

Before his resignation, Radhakrishnan issued a significant order in which he directed not to use the words "colony", "sanketham" and "ooru" to describe tribal family settlements.

Instead, he suggested use of the words "nagar," "unnathi" and "prakriti" to describe such areas, he said in the order.

Radhakrishnan later told reporters that discussions had been going on in this regard for some time, and finally a decision has been taken to abolish the practice of using such words. "The word colony is a symbol of colonial slavery. So, the usage should be abolished," he said.

After handing over his resignation, Radhakrishnan also said that he was stepping down with great satisfaction.

A central committee member of the CPI(M), he also said he tried to do maximum service for the people in his capacity as a minister. *—PTI*

Cong leader Kiran Choudhary, daughter Shruti to join BJP

CHANDIGARH, 18 JUNE

In a jolt to Congress in Haryana where assembly polls are due in October, party's senior leader Kiran Choudhary and her daughter Shruti Choudhary will join the ruling BJP on Wednesday.

Confirming the development, Kiran Choudhary, who is also a sitting MLA, told PTI she is quitting Congress and joining BJP on Wednesday.

Her daughter Shruti Choudhary, a former MP, is a working president of Haryana Congress.

Kiran Choudhary, daughter-in-law of former Haryana chief minister Bansi Lal, is considered as bete noire of senior Congress leader Bhupinder Singh Hooda and is learnt to be upset with the denial of ticket to Shruti Choudhary from Bhiwani-Mahendragarh constituency in the recently concluded Lok Sabha polls.

Shruti Choudhary *PHOTO: PTI*

Congress had given the ticket from the seat to sitting MLA and Hooda loyalist Rao Dan Singh, who lost to BJP's sitting MP Dharambir Singh.

Taking a veiled dig at Hooda, Choudhary said, "They have pushed me into a corner. There is a limit to humiliation one can suffer."

She said both she and Shruti will resign from the primary membership of the Congress to join the BJP.

In the recently held Lok Sabha polls, Congress and BJP won five seats each. *—PTI*

M'rashtra Cong worker washes Patole's feet, stirs row

AKOLA, 18 JUNE

A controversy has erupted after a video showed a Congress worker washing the feet of the party's Maharashtra Chief Nana Patole before stepping out of a car in Akola district of the state, with the ruling BJP targeting him for "insulting" the workers of his party.

The video shows the party worker pouring water on Patole's feet and cleaning them with his hands while the Congress leader is stepping out of the vehicle.

Reacting to the controversy over the episode, Patole said his feet got muddied after taking part in a procession of the holy symbolic footprints of Saint Gajanan Maharaj.

Congress worker washing the feet of the party's Maharashtra chief Nana Patole before the latter steps out of a car, in Akola on Tuesday *PHOTO: PTI*

Patole also hit out at the government saying that while the farmers are burdened by loans and need to be brought out of their plight, the ruling dispensation was not at all concerned.

Targeting Patole, BJP Mumbai uploaded the video on X and said, "What a misfortune, Congress is repeatedly insulting the workers whose might it uses to contest elections." *—PTI*

Jairam Ramesh *PHOTO: PTI*

PM not bestowing farmer's prasad, it's their right: Congress

NEW DELHI, 18 JUNE

The Congress Tuesday took a swipe at Prime Minister Narendra Modi over the "recycling" of headlines before the release of the 17th installment of PM-KISAN, saying it is not some "prasad" being bestowed on farmers but their legitimate right.

Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said as soon as the "one-third Pradhan Mantri" assumed office on 9th June, headlines screamed that the very first file he signed was to release the 17th instalment of PM-KISAN.

"Today again the headlines scream that the 'one-third' Pradhan Mantri will release the 17th instalment of PM Kisan," Ramesh said in a post on X.

"The non-biological Prime Minister is not bestowing some prasad on kisaans. It is their legitimate right and entitlement," he said.

Modi will travel to his parliamentary constituency Varanasi on Tuesday, his first visit after assuming office for the third consecutive term.

During his visit, the Prime Minister will participate in the PM-Kisan Samman Sammelan and release Rs 20,000 crore as part of the income support scheme for over 9.26 crore farmers. *—PTI*

'NOTHING AGAINST MUSLIMS'

Release 'Hamare Baarah': HC

MUMBAI, 18 JUNE

Bombay High Court on Tuesday said it watched actor Annu Kapoor-starrer "Hamare Baarah" movie and found nothing objectionable in it that was against the Quran or the Muslim community, and observed that the film is in fact aimed at upliftment of women. It also said that the Indian public was "not gullible or silly".

A division bench of Justices BP Colabawalla and Firdosh Pooniwalla said the film's first trailer was objectionable, but that has been removed and all such objectionable scenes have been deleted from the movie.

The court noted that it was in fact a "thinking movie" and not the sort where the audience is expected to "keep their brains at home" and only enjoy it. "The movie is in fact for the upliftment of women. The movie has a Maulana misinterpreting the Quran and in fact one Muslim man objects to the same in the scene," the court said.

The movie was initially slated to be released on 7 June *PHOTO: PTI*

A bunch of petitions were filed in the HC earlier this month seeking a ban on the movie claiming that it was derogatory towards the Muslim community and had distorted what the Quran says. It added that it was surprised that the petitioners were making such statements against the movie when they had not even seen the movie. The movie was initially slated to be released on 7 June and then on 14 June. *—PTI*

WB BJP team faces protest from own party workers

KOLKATA, 18 JUNE

A BJP central team visiting West Bengal on Tuesday faced protests from its own party workers, who claimed that senior leaders did not show empathy when they were displaced from their homes because of alleged post-poll violence in the state, party sources said.

The incident occurred at Amtala area in Diamond Harbour, the Lok Sabha constituency of TMC leader Abhishek Banerjee.

The four-member team, led by former Tripura Chief Minister Biplab Deb, has been touring West Bengal to assess the situation following alleged violence by Trinamool Congress workers against BJP workers after elections.

The team's convoy was stopped at Amtala by disgruntled party workers at Amtala in South 24 Parganas district, who aired their grievances to the visiting leaders, BJP sources said.

PHOTO: ANI

Later in the day, the team visited Sandeshkhali in North 24 Parganas district and spoke to local people of the area where TMC leaders were accused of sexual assault and land grabs.

Speaking to reporters at Sandeshkhali, BJP central team member Brij Lal said that the team is fully aware of the issues faced by the party workers. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Sri Lanka Navy arrests four Indian fishermen

COLOMBO, 18 JUNE

Four Indian fishermen were arrested and their trawler seized early on Tuesday by the Sri Lanka Navy for allegedly poaching in the island nation's waters, taking the total number of such arrests to more than 180 this year. "One Indian trawler was seized and four fishermen were arrested early on Tuesday around the northern islet of Delft in the Jaffna peninsula," Sri Lanka Navy said. Including Tuesday's arrests, a total of 182 Indian fishermen have been arrested and 25 of their trawlers seized so far in 2024. The numbers are almost 75 per cent of the approximate 240-245 held similarly in 2023. Sri Lanka's Ministry of Fisheries said the issue of alleged illegal fishing would be discussed with External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar when he arrives on 20 June. —*PTI*

Three insurgents arrested, arms seized in Manipur

IMPHAL, 18 JUNE

Security forces arrested three insurgents from Tengnoupal and seized sophisticated arms in Kangpokpi district, a Manipur Police statement said. Security forces arrested three valley-based insurgents from Shantong near Lamlong village in Tengnoupal district on 14 June, it said. In a separate search operation conducted at Gangpijang hill ranges in Kangpokpi district, security forces seized one 7.62mm AK 56 assault rifle, one pt. 22 rifle, one 12-inch single-bore barrel gun, two improvised projectile launchers, one Chinese hand grenade, one country-made hand grenade, one 51mm mortal and live ammunition on Sunday. Regular patrolling and area domination have been intensified in Barak and Jiri rivers. —*PTI*

Dubai-bound flight receive hoax bomb threat

NEW DELHI, 18 JUNE

Adding to the series of hoax call incidents hitting the national capital, a Dubai-bound plane that was scheduled to take off from Delhi received a bomb threat via email, police said on Tuesday. According to the Delhi Police, the bomb threat was received on Monday at 9:35 am. They further informed that, after receiving the threat, necessary legal action was taken and nothing suspicious was found. Last week, several museums in Delhi received bomb threats, which later turned out to be bogus, the police said. Several institutions; schools, colleges, hospitals, and airports, in the national capital have received hoax bomb threats lately. —*ANI*

Jaipur airport, college receive bomb threat

JAIPUR, 18 JUNE

Security agencies on Tuesday jointly conducted a thorough investigation at Jaipur airport after it received a bomb threat. Police and CISF searched the premises after the airport management received a bomb threat via email. "The airport was thoroughly checked but nothing suspicious has been found so far," the police said. The airport authorities received similar threats in April. A private college here received a bomb threat over email on Tuesday but nothing suspicious was found during a search, police said. The email was sent to the SSG Pareek PG College in Shastri Nagar. Police said the email was sent in the name of "KNR" group that also claimed responsibility for bomb threats given to schools in Delhi last month. —*PTI*

Severe heatwave to persist in UP, R'than, Delhi & Chhattisgarh

NEW DELHI, 18 JUNE

Heatwave to severe heat wave conditions are likely over many parts of Uttar Pradesh and some parts of Haryana-Chandigarh-Delhi as people in various parts of the country continue to grapple with severe heat conditions, the India Meteorological Department said.

Crippling heatwave continues in Rajasthan as Ganganagar recorded the highest maximum temperature in the state at 46.2 degrees Celsius on Tuesday, the meteorological centre here said.

While light rain was recorded in parts of eastern Rajasthan in the last 24 hours till 8.30 am today, the weather remained dry in the western region, it said.

The Jaipur Meteorological Centre has issued a warning of heatwave in many areas of the state for the next few days.

Ganganagar was the hottest place in Rajasthan at 46.2 degrees Celsius. The highest rainfall of six millimetres was recorded in Dholpur district's Baseri town.

According to the weather department, maximum temperature, in the next 48 hours, is likely to be recorded between 44 and 47 degrees Celsius in Bikaner, Bharatpur and Jaipur divisions. Heatwaves and hot nights will also prevail in some places.

Strong surface winds are likely to blow at a speed of 30 to 40 kilometres per hour in some parts of the state, the department said.

The temperature recorded in the national capital was 34.8 degrees Celsius on Tuesday, according to the India Meteorological Department (IMD).

The IMD on Monday also issued a red alert in Delhi and its bordering states as the heatwave conditions continue to prevail in the region.

"There have been heatwave conditions in parts of the state during the past few days and is expected to continue during the next two days. In some parts of Una Hamirpur, and Sirmaur there are severe heatwaves. PTI/—*ANI*

India Meteorological Department has issued a 'red' alert because of prevailing heatwave conditions in the national capital PHOTO: PTI

Even 0.001% negligence in NEET must be dealt with: SC

Court said the pleas would come up for hearing on 8 July

NEW DELHI, 18 JUNE

Supreme Court on Tuesday said even if there was "0.001 per cent negligence" on the part of anyone in the conduct of the NEET-UG 2024 examination, it should be thoroughly dealt with.

Observing that students have to labour hard while preparing for these examinations, the apex court said the litigation pertaining to the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (Undergraduate)-2024 examination ought not be treated as adversarial.

"Even if there is 0.001 per cent negligence on the part of anyone, it should be thoroughly dealt with," a vacation bench of Justices Vikram Nath and SVN Bhatti told the advocates appearing for the Centre and the National Testing Agency (NTA).

"We all know the labour which the children undergo, especially in preparing for these exams," the bench said, adding, "Imagine a person who has played fraud on the system becomes a doctor, he is more deleterious to the society".

Stressing on timely action by the authority, the top court said the pleas would come up for hearing on 8 July along with other pending petitions, including those which have sought a direction to conduct the exam afresh.

Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leaders gathered at the Jantar Mantar on Tuesday to protest against the alleged irregularities in the NEET exam.

Delhi Health Minister Saurabh Bharadwaj demanded that a Supreme Court monitored probe be initiated into the matter.

Bharadwaj cited the example of Bihar where some aspirants received the exam's question paper and answers in a 'safe house' near Patna a day before it was conducted. —*PTI*

Various student unions take part in a protest over the alleged irregularities in NEET exam results, in Hyderabad on Tuesday PHOTO: PTI

Rahul slams Modi's 'silence' on NEET

New Delhi, 18 June

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday hit out at Prime Minister Narendra Modi for maintaining "silence" on NEET exam issue. He said the arrests made in Bihar, Gujarat and Haryana clearly show that there has been organised corruption in the examination in a planned manner and added these BJP-ruled states have become the "epicentre" of paper leaks. He said that his party will be a voice for the youth in the Parliament. —*PTI*

SERVICES RESTORED

Toll rises to 10 in WB train tragedy

KOLKATA, 18 JUNE

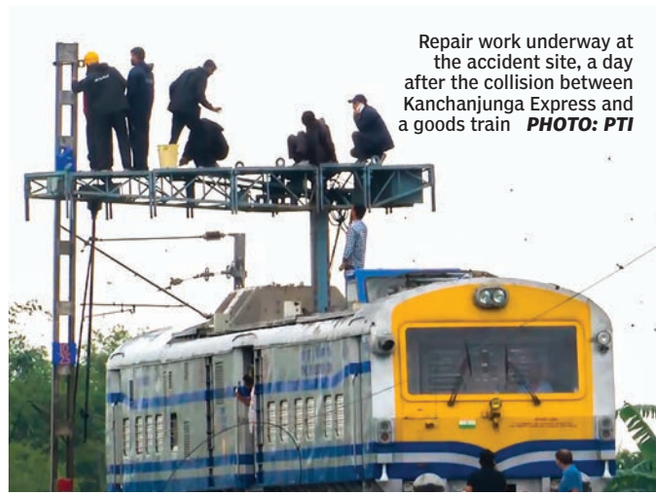
Train services in both the up and down lines at Rangapani near West Bengal's New Jalpaiguri station were restored on Tuesday following repair work on a war footing, a senior official said. The accident claimed lives of 10 people.

Train operations on the route were hampered following an accident there on Monday morning when a goods train rammed Agartala-Sealdah Kanchanjunga Express from behind.

Train services in the down line were restored on Monday night, and in the up line, diesel locomotive-run train services were restarted on Tuesday morning, divisional railway manager of Katihar S Kumar said. The unaffected coaches of the Kanchanjunga Express, which was hit by a goods train near New Jalpaiguri, leaving 10 dead and several injured, arrived at Sealdah station here on Tuesday morning with nearly 850 passengers, according to an Eastern Railway official.

Chief Commissioner of Railway Safety, Northeast Frontier Railway, Janak Kumar Garg, will hold a statutory inquiry on 19 June.

—*PTI/ ANI*



Repair work underway at the accident site, a day after the collision between Kanchanjunga Express and a goods train PHOTO: PTI

SIKKIM LANDSLIDES

More than 200 tourists have been evacuated while around 1,000 are still stranded in Lachung as landslides hit Sikkim's Mangan district, cutting off the highway, on Tuesday PHOTO: PTI

Survivor of Raipur mob attack on cattle carriers succumbs

RAIPUR, 18 JUNE

A 25-year-old man, who was critically injured in an alleged mob attack wherein two cattle transporters were killed here earlier this month, died in a hospital on Tuesday, police said.

Two cattle transporters, Guddu Khan, 35, and Chand Miya Khan, 23, died under suspicious circumstances on 7 June after being allegedly chased by a mob in Arnag police station area of Chhattisgarh's Raipur district.

Saddam Qureshi was seriously injured and was hospitalised.

On Monday, Qureshi was shifted to the government-run DKS Super Specialty Hospital here from Shri Balaji Super Specialty Hospital, a private medical facility in Raipur, where he was on ventilator support since the incident.

Raipur Additional Superintendent of Police (rural) Kirtan Rathore confirmed that Qureshi died on Tuesday and said no arrest has been made in the case so far.

The three victims, hailing from Uttar Pradesh, were on 7 June found below a bridge on the Mahanadi River in Arang area. As per the FIR, complainant Shoheb Khan claimed Chand informed him over phone that when the trio was heading in the cattle-laden truck from neighbouring Mahasamund district towards Arang, they were chased by some people on motorcycles and other vehicles.

After a tyre of the truck burst, the people chasing the victims started abusing and thrashing them, it said. —*PTI*

Holy mass row: Priests seek Latin Church intervention

KOCHI, 18 MAY

Amid the escalating Holy Mass row in the Syro-Malabar Church, the secretary of the presbyteral council of the Ernakulam-Angamaly archdiocese has sent a letter to all archbishops and bishops of the Latin Catholic Church seeking their intervention in the matter.

In his letter on Monday, Fr Kuriakose Mundadan, the presbyteral council secretary of the archdiocese, alleged that the circular issued by the Major Archbishop of the Ernakulam-Angamaly archdiocese and the Apostolic Administrator has threatened the protesting priests of the archdiocese with excommunication if they do not celebrate the Uniform Holy Mass or the Synod Mass by 3 July, 2024.

The Latin Church and the Syro-Malabar Church are both autonomous (sui iuris) churches within the Catholic Church, united under the authority of the Pope.

—*PTI*

NCW got 12,600 plaints, most from UP

NEW DELHI, 18 JUNE

As many as 12,600 complaints have been received by the National Commission for Women (NCW) so far this year, with Uttar Pradesh achieving the dubious distinction of registering the highest number of complaints, according to official data.

The highest number of complaints were received in the right to dignity category that involves harassment other than domestic violence. It stood at 3,107, according to the NCW data.

This was followed by 3,544 complaints of domestic violence. Dowry harassment complaints stood at 1,957, molestation complaints at 817, police apathy against women complaints at 518, and rape and attempt to rape complaints at 657, the data showed.

There were 493 complaints of sexual harassment, 339 of cybercrime, 345 of stalking and 206 of honour crimes, it stated.

Uttar Pradesh recorded the highest number of complaints at 6,470 followed by Delhi at 1,113 and Maharashtra at 762, according to the data.

- Highest number of complaints were received in the right to dignity category that involves harassment other than domestic violence

Bihar recorded 584 complaints, Madhya Pradesh 514, Haryana 506, Rajasthan 408, Tamil Nadu 301, West Bengal 306 and Karnataka 305. A total of 28,811 complaints related to women were registered by the NCW in 2023. —*PTI*

PHOTO: FREEPIK

Kerala: 300 seek treatment for food poisoning

KOCHI, 18 JUNE

Over 300 people, including children, living in an apartment complex in Kakkanad near here sought treatment for food poisoning in the last couple of days, prompting municipal and health authorities to inspect the water sources used by the residents of the flats.

Kerala Health Minister Veena George on Tuesday said that she was informed a day ago by some residents of the apartment complex in Thrikkakara municipality that over the last few days, several hundred people have fallen sick there.

The minister said that it appears to be a serious issue as there have been instances of water contamination in the recent past in the city and thousands of families are living in the apartment complex.

The municipal authorities said the results of one round of tests of the water samples taken from the complex on Monday were not available.

—*PTI*

3 BODY PROBLEM?

Palghar man bludgeons girlfriend to death in public

PALGHAR, 18 JUNE

A 20-year-old woman was attacked and killed allegedly by her boyfriend in full public view in Maharashtra's Palghar district on Tuesday morning, police said.

A video of the attack that took place around 8.30am in the Chinchpada locality of Vasai has surfaced on social media.

The victim, Aarti Yadav, was on her way to work with her boyfriend, Rohit Yadav, when they quarrelled midway, an official said.

Rohit allegedly stabbed the victim multiple times with a sharp object and continued to attack her even after she collapsed on the ground, he said.

The accused did not flee the scene and sat on the steps near the body, the official said.

A team from the Valiv police rushed to the spot and sent the body for a post-mortem, he said.

The couple had been in a relationship for the last six years, but they were having problems as the accused suspected the woman of having an affair with another man, the official said.

According to the police, some passers-by just stood and witnessed the attack, and some even shot videos.

The police have detained a woman and a man who shot videos of the attack and uploaded them on social media. —*PTI*

People watched in silence

PALGHAR, 18 JUNE

A jilted lover struck 18 blows on the head of his girlfriend on a road in Vasai on Friday, even as scores of people watched the gory spectacle, police said.

"Kyun kiya aisa mere saath (why did you do this to me)," the man kept saying as continued to hit her head with the spanner. Except for a person who ventured out to intervene, the scores of bystanders remained mute spectators.

The video footage shows a large crowd watching the attack, but no one intervened to help the woman as the man rained blows on her with the spanner, police said. Police have detained a man and a woman who shot videos of the attack and uploaded them on social media.

CCTV footage of the incident went viral on social media, prompting indignation from the public.

Maharashtra Legislative Council deputy chairperson Neelam Gorhe said there is a need to implement the "zero tolerance for crimes against women" policy. —*PTI*

REVOLUTION DAY IN GOA

Goa Governor PS Sreedharan Pillai, Chief Minister Pramod Sawant and MoS Shripad Y. Naik pay tribute to freedom fighters on Goa Revolution Day, in Panaji, on Tuesday ***PHOTO: PTI***

Will Arundhati Roy face jail for 14-year-old remark?

Last week, 14 years after the original complaint, Delhi's most senior official granted permission for the Booker Prize-winning author Arundhati Roy to be prosecuted under India's stringent anti-terror laws. The Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) is notorious for making it exceptionally challenging to get bail, often resulting in years of detention until the completion of trial.

Modi government has been accused of using the law to silence critics, including activists, journalists and civil society members.

Roy, 62, an outspoken writer and activist, is in the dock for comments on Kashmir, a perennial lightning rod in India.

"Kashmir has never been an integral part of India. It is a historical fact. Even the Indian government has accepted this," she said at a stormy, day-long conference in Delhi, organised by the Committee for the Release of Political Prisoners, in October 2010.

At the time, Indian-administered Kashmir was in turmoil, with locals describing it as a fierce uprising against India.

Roy's remarks had followed the deaths of dozens of protesters since fresh pro-freedom demonstrations broke out earlier that year.

India and neighbouring Pakistan, nuclear armed-rivals, claim the disputed region in full and have fought two wars over it.

Roy's remarks predictably set off a firestorm of protest, with many critics questioning her loyalty to India, and the federal government, then led by Congress party, threatening to arrest her on charges of sedition. A senior minister said while India enjoyed freedom of speech, "it can't violate the patriotic sentiments of the people".

There were protests outside Roy's home in an upscale Delhi neighbourhood. A criminal complaint was lodged against her and another defendant Sheikh Showkat Hussain, a law teacher from Kashmir, accusing them and two others of sedition.

Arundhati Roy, 62, an outspoken writer and activist, is in the dock for comments on Kashmir, a perennial lightning rod in India ***PHOTO: PTI***

Roy defended her right to free speech soon after the controversy. "In the papers some have accused me of giving 'hate-speeches', of wanting India to break up. On the contrary, what I say comes from love and pride," she wrote in a response.

"It comes from not wanting people to be killed, raped, imprisoned or have their finger-nails pulled out in order to force them to say they are Indians... Pity the nation that has to silence its writers for speaking their minds."

Lawyers are puzzled by the decision to prosecute Ms Roy more than a decade after her speech. She was originally accused of sedition, but the Supreme Court suspended the colonial-era sedition law in May 2022; invoking UAPA charges allows the state to bypass the statute of limitations and proceed with the case.

Roy has been a trenchant critic of Modi's government, which rights groups accuse of targeting activists and muzzling free speech. The permission for her prosecution comes just after Modi's re-election for a third term.

Many view this as a political signal that BJP will continue its strong-arm tactics, even in coalition government. Sushil Pandit, the main complainant from 2010, refused to speculate on the delay. "Those who sat on these files and decided to act now should explain. There must be an inquiry into why this was delayed, and accountability should follow," he told Times Now television.

Others view this as another attempt to silence Modi's critics. When Delhi authorities approved the case to proceed in court in October, Canadian writer and activist Naomi Klein warned Modi on X: "You have no idea what you will unleash by pursuing this political prosecution to silence your most eloquent critic."

In the minutes of the conference, Shivam Vij described it as "historic in every aspect given the topicality of the issue". Speakers included a well-known poet, several activists and journalists.

However, Pandit, the Kashmiri activist present at the meeting, had a different view.

Over the past two decades, Roy has written several non-fiction books and numerous essays on topics like nuclear weapons, Kashmir, big dams, globalisation, Dalit icon BR Ambedkar, meetings with Maoist rebels, and conversations with Edward Snowden and John Cusack.

The God of Small Things, a riveting family saga inspired by her family childhood, picked up the 1997 Man Booker Prize - a "Tiger Woodesian debut" gushed John Updike - and made Roy a celebrity writer at 35. The 62-year-old author is also a polarising figure in India.

Critics, however, have burned her effigies, disrupted her events, and she has faced charges of sedition and contempt, even spending a day in jail for protesting against big dams.

They find a lot of her non-fiction writings shrill, naïve, adolescent, self-indulgent and simplistic, peddling "picturesque poverty". One critic wrote that so often in her essays Roy "never really gets to grips with the evidence".

Since Roy's 2010 remarks, significant changes have occurred.

In 2019, Modi's government revoked Kashmir's semi-autonomous status, dividing the region and reducing its political autonomy under direct federal control.

Many believe freedom of expression has also declined: since 2014, India has fallen from 150th to 161st in media freedom rankings by Reporters Without Borders, out of 180 countries.

Roy has declined to comment on the latest development. It is unclear if the police have investigated the allegations or have evidence against her and the other accused.

Two individuals named in the original complaint have passed away. But one thing is certain. If one of India's most feted writers faces imprisonment under a draconian anti-terror law, it will ignite global condemnation and outrage. *—BBC News*

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

SALAR سالار

Priyanka Gandhi to finally make electoral debut

Priyanka Gandhi, sister of main Opposition Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, is set to contest her first election, ending decades of anticipation by her supporters.

Priyanka is a descendant of the Nehru-Gandhi family, India's most famous political dynasty, and her electoral debut will be closely watched.

The 52-year-old will contest the Wayanad seat in the southern Indian state of Kerala after her brother relinquishes it.

A win for Priyanka would mean the presence of all three Gandhi family members in the Indian parliament.

Her mother Sonia Gandhi, former president of Congress, is an MP in the Rajya Sabha. Her brother Rahul Gandhi won the recent parliamentary elections from both Wayanad and Uttar Pradesh's Rae Bareli seats.

Rahul, who has represented Wayanad as an MP since 2019, is giving it up as he can only retain one parliamentary seat under Indian law. On Monday, he thanked the people of Wayanad for their "love, affection and support".

A date for the by-election is yet to be announced but Gandhi says she is "not nervous at all".

"I am very happy to be able to represent Wayanad and I will not let them feel his [Rahul's] absence," she said on Monday. "I will work hard and I will try my best to make everyone happy and be a good representative."

The by-election will mark the end of a decades-long wait by Congress supporters for Priyanka's involvement in electoral politics.

Journalist Javed Ansari, who has reported on the Congress party for decades, told BBC Hindi that he was not surprised by the announcement.

"I think it was a question of when [she would contest] and not if," he said.

For years, Priyanka was considered the more popular of the Gandhi siblings with many blaming the "lacklustre leadership" of her brother for a string of Congress defeats between 2014 and 2019.

From an early age, people have pointed to her resemblance to her grandmother and former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi.

She was actively involved in the election campaigns of her mother from the late 1990s. She also campaigned for her brother when he actively joined politics in 2004.

Senior leaders have praised her political acumen and her flair for engaging with people.

Priyanka's official entry into politics came when she was put in charge of the Congress campaign in the eastern part of Uttar Pradesh state, ahead of the 2019 general election.

Congress went on to perform poorly in that election and the state assembly polls in 2022, but she was not blamed. Senior party leaders said the performance was not a reflection of her work and in line with their expectations.

Appointed Congress' general secretary in 2019, Priyanka has since overseen the party's campaigns in several state elections.

Party leaders say she's been crucial in stabilising the Congress government in Himachal Pradesh state this year amid rebellion by some of its own lawmakers.

She was also at the forefront of Congress's campaign in Uttar Pradesh state - where Opposition parties performed surprisingly well - and especially in the Gandhi family bastions of Amethi and Rae Bareli.

Political commentator Neerja Chowdhury said it would be interesting to see the siblings in parliament together if Priyanka wins.

"Personally, I think Priyanka is savvier of the two. She thinks on her feet and her language is clearer than his," she said, adding that she will be "watched very closely".

But the announcement of her candidacy received praise from Annie Raja, a member of the Communist Party of India (CPI) who had contested against Rahul in Wayanad in the recent election.

Raja, who lost the election by a margin of over 360,000 votes, did not confirm whether she would run against Ms Gandhi in the by-election.

But she said, "We need more and more women in parliament." *—BBC News*

Priyanka was considered the more popular of Gandhi siblings with many blaming "lacklustre leadership" of her brother, Rahul Gandhi, for a string of Congress defeats between 2014 & 2019 ***PHOTO: PTI***

How the USA became the unexpected darlings of T20 World Cup?

When USA opened ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2024 with a seven-wicket win over Canada on 1 June, the result was met with a metaphorical warm applause.

Five days later, their thrilling super-over win against Pakistan made cricket fans and experts sit up and take note. It was a moment that turned Group A – and the tournament – on its head.

When cricket's powerhouse India scraped past them in New York the following week, USA were still alive in the tournament and favourites to qualify for the Super Eights – a feat they later achieved thanks to a washed-out match against Ireland.

As with most underdog stories, USA's progression was received by rousing cheers around the world.

In some ways, it is fitting that the USA squad is representative of a multicultural country defined by the tales of immigrants chasing the fabled American dream.

Some of the players were born in the United States.

Others, born overseas, tasted domestic success in their countries of birth and even dreamt of playing international cricket until they seemingly failed and all but gave up.

This group of cricketers draws its experience from playing in India, Pakistan, the Caribbean, South Africa and New Zealand.

An Australian coach, who linked up with them two weeks ahead of the tournament, has led them on this unprecedented run where, against the most formidable odds, they have made it past the first round in their first major international tournament. But that's not how the story began. It began with a combination of timing, luck and shrewdness.

The motley crew that became world beaters

Shortly after USA Cricket (USAC) was granted one-day international (ODI) status by the ICC in 2019, the waiting period for players to qualify for associate countries dropped from five years to three.

USAC immediately went on a recruitment drive to attract talent from across the globe.

Several players heeded the call, while others were scouted from domestic competitions within the country.

Former New Zealand star Corey Anderson, who has a wealth of T20 franchise experience, became eligible to represent USA in 2023.

It was also the year that Harmeet Singh joined the team USA bandwagon. The Mumbai-raised all-rounder shone for India in two ICC Under-19 World Cups and played in the Indian Premier League (IPL) until he was dragged into a damaging fixing scandal, only to be cleared of any wrongdoing. It was enough to stagnate his career but – unwilling to give up – Harmeet moved to the US during the Covid-19 pandemic.

USA have qualified for the Super Eight round of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2024 in their first appearance at the tournament ***PHOTO: ANI***

Shayan Jahangir was a promising young batter growing up in Karachi who, at one point, represented Pakistan at the under-19 level. He plied his trade in the US domestic leagues during the cricket off-season period in Pakistan before moving permanently to Houston in 2018.

Former South African domestic cricket star Shadley van Schalkwyk made Seattle his home after being unable to break into the Proteas' side despite taking almost 500 wickets and scoring more than 4,000 runs across formats in the domestic system.

Steven Taylor, who hails from Florida, has been a key member of team USA since 2019 but once represented Jamaica.

Despite the players' vastly diverse backgrounds, their head coach Stuart Law – who was appointed in April and took charge in May – emphasises that this is very much a US team.

"These kids came here from other parts of the world for a better life," Law told Al Jazeera shortly after USA sealed their trip to the Caribbean, where all Super Eights and knockout matches will be played.

"Whether they came here for their children's education, or their own, not many came purely to play cricket."

How to 'Americanfy' cricket

Law insists that while the players may have been lucky that their arrival in the US coincided with cricket's emergence in the country, they are united in their cause to play as team USA.

"We have got to try and 'Americanfy' this whole cricket thing here in the States," he adds.

"We need to play aggressive, attractive-looking cricket to make sure that people sit back and go: You know what, these kids are up for a fight."

The 55-year-old coach, who has been at the helm of several international teams, says team USA's motto of "fearless but intelligent cricket" suits most of the players.

"They are trying to get better all the time, trying to play the way [they] will be successful in not only winning, but also putting the game of cricket under a spotlight.

The players, with their individual experiences in other countries, have a lack of awe while playing World Cup matches, which was wonderfully demonstrated by their nerve-jangling victory over 2009 champions Pakistan.

Law recounts one of several stories about his players: "Shayan came up to me before the World Cup and said, 'Coach, we can beat Pakistan!' I think that belief filtered through to each one of us and we showed it. The belief was there to go and execute under immense pressure, in front of a full house and screaming fans in Dallas."

Law believes that Anderson, a veteran of three World Cups for New Zealand, has played a vital role in keeping players calm on the pitch.

He describes Monank Patel – who captained the side for the first two matches before sustaining a shoulder injury – as a deep thinker. And Jones – who led the side against India – has impressed Law with his cool-headedness and forthrightness. Both leaders are fiercely competitive.

—Al Jazeera

PHOTO: BLOOMBERG

South Korea orders striking doctors to return to work

SEOUL, 18 JUNE

South Korean officials issued return-to-work orders for doctors participating in a one-day walkout on Tuesday as part of a protracted strike against government plans to boost medical school admissions, starting next year. Since February, more than 12,000 trainee doctors have remained on strike amid a deepening standoff with government officials, who want to grow the country's number of doctors by up to 10,000 by 2035. Many reject the plan, saying schools won't be able to handle the increased flow and that the quality of the country's medical services would suffer. About 4 per cent of the country's 36,000 private medical facilities, categorised as clinics, have told authorities they would participate in a one-day strike on Tuesday, according to South Korea's Health and Welfare Ministry.—*AP*

Taiwan to receive 1,700 TOW 2B missiles from US

TAIPEI, 18 JUNE

Taiwan's Defence Minister Wellington Koo announced on Monday that the island nation is set to receive all 1,700 TOW 2B anti-tank missiles and 100 launchers purchased from the United States by the end of this year, following a two-year delay, Focus Taiwan reported. The timeline update came during a legislative session in response to queries from ruling Democratic Progressive Party lawmaker Wang Ting-yu about the delivery schedule. Originally allocated NTD11.81 billion (USD364 million) over the fiscal years 2018-2025 for the procurement, Taiwan had expected delivery to commence in 2022 but faced setbacks. According to Wang, Taiwan has yet to receive any missiles as per the original schedule due to failed US Army tests.—*ANI*

Over 75 M in the US are under heat alerts

PHOENIX, 18 JUNE

Over 75 million people in the United States were under extreme heat alerts on Monday as a heat wave moved eastward, and the mid-Atlantic and New England were likely to see highs in the 90s as the week progresses. Excessive humidity will make it feel even more oppressive. The US last year saw the most heat waves, consisting of abnormally hot weather lasting more than two days, since 1936. Officials again warned residents to take precautions. Much of the Midwest and Northeast were under heat warnings or watches. The heat has been especially dangerous in recent years in Phoenix, where 645 people died from heat-related causes in 2023, which was a record. —*PTI*

Ex-Thai PM indicted on charges of royal defamation

BANGKOK, 18 JUNE

Former Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra was granted release on bail hours after he was formally indicted Tuesday on a charge of defaming the country's monarchy in one of several court cases that have rattled Thai politics. Thaksin, an influential political figure despite being ousted from power in a coup 18 years ago, reported himself to prosecutors Tuesday morning and was indicted, Prayuth Bejraguna, spokesperson for the Attorney General, said at a news conference. Thaksin, 74, voluntarily returned to Thailand last year from self-imposed exile and served virtually all of his sentence on corruption-related charges in a hospital rather than prison on medical grounds. He was granted release on parole. Since then, Thaksin has maintained a high profile as the unofficial power behind the party. —*AP*

Putin vows to beat sanctions together with North Korea's Kim

Vladimir Putin is first Russian President to visit North Korea in 24 years

SEOUL, 18 JUNE

Russian President Vladimir Putin thanked North Korea for supporting his actions in Ukraine and said their countries will cooperate closely to overcome US-led sanctions as he headed to Pyongyang on Tuesday for a summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un. He arrived in North Korea for the first time in 24 years.

Russia and North Korea may sign a security partnership agreement during Putin's visit, according to his policy adviser, Yuri Ushakov.

While not directed against any country, Ushakov said the pact would "outline prospects for further cooperation". Putin's delegation - which includes Defence Minister Andrei Belousov, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and the heads of the Russian space agency - could also provide clues as to what might be on the agenda.

Russian President Vladimir Putin arriving North Korea on Tuesday *PHOTO: AP*

Analysts say the visit will also be a chance for Putin and Kim to show off their growing alliance to the world.

- Russia and North Korea may sign a security partnership agreement during Putin's visit, according to his policy adviser, Yuri Ushakov

The meeting will likely "signal a deepening in their strategic partnership. Kim will be keen for Russia to agree on new forms of cooperation, including in technical areas," says Ankit Panda, an analyst at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

Michael Madden, founder of North Korea Leadership Watch, says Russia might even even seek North Korea's greater participation in the Brics alliance, where Russia holds the rotating chairmanship, he says.

Andrei Lankov, one of the world's leading authorities on North Korea, agrees with other analysts BBC has spoken to: the visit is all about Russia buying ammunition for its war in Ukraine. "From a purely economic point of view, North Korea has nearly zero value for Russia," Professor Lankov, director at NK News, told BBC. The US and Seoul have accused North Korea of supplying Russia with artillery and other equipment, likely in exchange for food and military aid.

After North Korea, Putin will visit Vietnam, a long-time ally - both countries are expected to discuss issues such as trade.

—*BBC News/ AP*

S Korean army fires shots after N Koreans intrude

SEOUL, 18 JUNE

South Korean soldiers fired warning shots to repel North Korean soldiers who temporarily crossed the rivals' land border on Tuesday for the second time this month, South Korea's military said.

The South's military observed increased North Korean construction activities along their heavily armed border to install suspected anti-tank barriers, reinforce roads and plant land mines. The work has gone on uninterrupted despite several explosions caused by mines that killed or injured an unspecified number of North Korean soldiers, said the South's Joint Chiefs of Staff.

According to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, around 20 to 30 North Korean soldiers, while engaging in unspecified construction work on the northern side of the border, briefly crossed the military demarcation line that bisects the countries as of 8:30 am. It said the North Korean soldiers retreated after the South broadcasts warnings and fired warning shots and the South's military didn't spot any suspicious activity after that.

The South also fired warning shots on 11 June after another group of North Korean soldiers briefly crossed the MDL. The Joint Chiefs of Staff said that Tuesday's incident occurred in a different area along the central frontline region. It said it doesn't believe the North Korean soldiers intruded the border intentionally and that the North did not return fire. —*AP*

60 MISSING

Migrant boat capsizes off Italy coast; at least 11 dead

PARIS, 18 JUNE

At least 11 people have died and more than 60 are missing as a result of two shipwrecks off the coast of southern Italy, rescuers say.

German charity RESQSHIP said it picked up 51 people from a sinking, wooden boat and found 10 bodies trapped in the lower deck near the island of Lampedusa on Monday. In a separate incident on the same day, more than 60 people were reported missing, with 26 of them feared to be children, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) said.

The boats were carrying migrants who had set off from Libya and Turkey, UN agencies said. Survivors of the shipwreck near Lampedusa were handed over to the Italian coastguard and taken ashore on Monday morning, while the deceased were being towed to the island, according to RESQSHIP.

The boat had set off from Libya, and was carrying migrants from Syria, Egypt, Pakistan and Bangladesh, the UN refugee agency UNHCR, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and UN children's agency UNICEF said in a joint statement.

An Italian Coast Guard vessel near one of the migrant boats, which caught fire and overturned 200 km east of Italy *PHOTO: X/ITALIAN COAST GUARD*

The other shipwreck was located about 125 miles off the coast of Calabria in southern Italy, the agencies said. One of the surviving 12 people died after disembarking, the Italian coastguard said.

MSF's Shakilla Mohammadi said she heard from survivors that 66 people were unaccounted for, including at least 26 children, some only a few months old.

"Entire families from Afghanistan are presumed dead. They left from Turkey eight days ago and had taken in water for three or four days. They told us they had no life vests and some vessels did not stop to help them," she said.

—*BBC News*

Thailand's Senate legalises same-sex marriage

BANGKOK, 18 JUNE

Thailand's Senate voted overwhelmingly on Tuesday to approve a marriage equality bill, clearing the last legislative hurdle for the country to become the first in Southeast Asia to enact such a law.

The bill passed its final reading with the approval of 130 of the 152 members of the Senate in attendance, with 4 voting against it and 18 abstaining. The bill now needs the pro forma endorsement of King Maha Vajiralongkorn, followed by its publication in the Government Gazette, which will set a date within 120 days when it becomes effective.

Thailand will become the third place in Asia, after Taiwan and Nepal, to allow same-sex marriage.

The marriage equality bill, which grants full legal, financial and medical rights for marriage partners of any gender, sailed through the House of Representatives right before the previous parliamentary session concluded in April.

The bill amends the Civil and Commercial Code to change the words "men and women" and "husband and wife" to "individuals" and "marriage partners."

The bill passed its final reading with the approval of 130 of the 152 members of the Senatex *PHOTO: X/@THAVISIN*

Thailand has a reputation for acceptance and inclusivity but has struggled for decades to pass a marriage equality law.

Thai society largely holds conservative values, and members of the LGBTQ+ community say they face discrimination in everyday life. The government and state agencies are also historically conservative, and advocates for gender equality have had a hard time pushing lawmakers and civil servants to accept change. —*AP*

Aus visit: Chinese premier focuses on critical minerals

MELBOURNE, 18 JUNE

Chinese Premier Li Qiang has ended his Australian tour on Tuesday in the west coast city of Perth where he has focused on China's investment in critical minerals, clean energy and business links.

Perth is the capital of Western Australia state, which provided 39% of the world's iron ore last year. Iron ore is one of Australia's most lucrative exports. Analysts say the commodity was spared the type of trade bans Beijing imposed on other Australian exports as bilateral relations soured three years ago because the steel-making ingredient was crucial to Chinese industrial growth.

Li last week became the first Chinese premier to visit New Zealand then Australia in seven years. He left Perth late Tuesday for Malaysia, where he'll be China's first premier to visit since 2015.

While in Perth, China's second-most powerful leader after President Xi Jinping inspected iron ore miner Fortescue's clean energy research facility. Fortescue's chairman Andrew Forrest said Li was interested in the company's plans to produce iron ore without carbon emissions and potentially "green iron." The Perth facility is testing technology on hydrogen, ammonia and batter power for trains, ships, trucks and heavy mining equipment. Li also visited Chinese-controlled Tianqi Lithium Energy Australia's processing plant south of Perth to underscore China's interest in investing in critical minerals. The plant produces battery-grade lithium hydroxide for electric vehicles.

Citing Australia's national interests, Treasurer Jim Chalmers recently ordered five Chinese-linked companies to divest their shares in the rare earth mining company Northern Minerals. —*AP*

Pannun 'murder' plot: Nikhil Gupta pleads not guilty

NEW YORK, 18 JUNE

Indian national Nikhil Gupta, accused of being involved in a murder-for-hire plot against a Sikh extremist on American soil, pleaded not guilty as he was arraigned in federal court here. Gupta was extradited to the US from the Czech Republic on 14 June, which court records show as the day of his arrest in the US.

He made his first appearance in Manhattan federal court before Magistrate Judge James Cott on Monday afternoon for his arraignment and pleaded not guilty. Gupta's attorney Jeffrey Chabrowe entered the "not guilty" plea on his behalf. Gupta is being held in a Brooklyn detention facility. Gupta is charged with murder-for-hire and conspiracy to commit murder-for-hire. If convicted, he faces a maximum sentence of 10 years in prison for each charge. The next court hearing in the case is on 28 June. Court records show that a status conference has been set for 28 June before Judge Victor Marrero. During the initial appearance, Gupta's lawyer told the judge that his client is a vegetarian and had not been provided a vegetarian meal in the detention facility. US Attorney General Merrick Garland said in a statement that Gupta's "extradition makes clear that the Justice Department will not tolerate attempts to silence or harm American citizens".

US Attorney Damian Williams for the Southern District of New York said the extradition "makes clear our unwavering resolve to investigate, thwart, and prosecute those who seek to harm and silence US citizens here and elsewhere".

—*PTI*

Southern China faces heavy floods, landslides; at least 9 killed

BEIJING, 18 JUNE

Southern China was reeling on Tuesday from heavy rains that triggered landslides killing at least nine people, knocking out power for entire villages and burying crops.

Meanwhile, northern parts of the country are battling drought, as the country faces two extremes of severe weather.

Four people were killed and two others were missing in Wuping county in the coastal province of Fujian due to landslides caused by torrential rain. Severe downpours started on Sunday afternoon, with authorities measuring 372.4 millimetres (14.7 inches) of rainfall over a 24-hour period.

At least 378 houses collapsed in the county, and 880 hectares (2,175 acres) of crops were damaged, amounting to economic losses of at least USD 57.2 million in Wuping, authorities said, according to the Xinhua news agency.

At least 1,30,000 households experienced power outages *PHOTO: XINHUA*

In the southern Guangdong province, bordering Hong Kong, landslides triggered by severe flooding killed at least five people in the city of Meizhou. Fifteen others were missing, according to local media reports. At least 1,30,000 households in Meizhou experienced power outages, with some neighbouring towns and villages out of contact as of Monday. Three helicopters and more than 200 teams of rescuers were searching for survivors and delivering aid to the affected areas, according to local authorities.

More than 11,000 people were moved after the Hanjiang River in south China's Pearl River basin flooded, drowning crop fields and inundating homes. In the southwestern Guizhou province, more than 1,100 people were evacuated due to flooding in several counties. —*AP*

Boeing chief admits culture 'far from perfect'

NEW YORK, 18 JUNE

- The company has been in the spotlight since an unused door fell off a brand new 737 Max plane during a flight leaving a gaping hole in its side

Boeing's chief executive Dave Calhoun will tell US lawmakers on Tuesday that he understands concerns about its safety culture after a mid-air emergency in January raised alarm.

In prepared remarks ahead of the US Senate sub-committee hearing, he said: "Our culture is far from perfect, but we are taking action and making progress. We understand the gravity." The company has been in the spotlight since an unused door fell off a brand new 737 Max plane during a flight operated by Alaska Airlines, leaving a gaping hole in its side. As part of an ongoing investigation, Boeing whistleblowers told the Senate in April that the 737 Max, the 787 Dreamliner and the 777 models had serious production issues. But concerns about Boeing's attitudes toward safety and quality control conditions in its factories are not new. The company faced intense criticism five years ago, after two 737 Max aircraft were lost in separate, but almost identical accidents, killing 346 people. Calhoun is also expected to apologise to the families affected on Tuesday in what will mark his first time giving testimony in front of the panel during his time as chief executive.

"We are deeply sorry for your losses," his prepared opening comment says.

—*BBC News*

UNDER NEW PLAN FROM BIDEN

500K immigrants to get US citizenship

WASHINGTON, 18 JUNE

US President Joe Biden is taking an expansive, election-year step to offer relief to potentially hundreds of thousands of immigrants without legal status in the US — aiming to balance his own aggressive crackdown on the border earlier this month that enraged advocates and many Democratic lawmakers.

The White House announced on Tuesday that the Biden administration will, in the coming months, allow certain spouses of US citizens without legal status to apply for permanent residency and eventually, citizenship. The move could affect upwards of half a million immigrants, according to senior administration officials.

US President Joe Biden *PHOTO: PTI*

To qualify, an immigrant must have lived in the United States for 10 years as of Monday and be married to a US citizen. If a qualifying immigrant's application is approved, he or she would have three years to apply for a green card, and receive a temporary work permit and be shielded from deportation in the meantime.

About 50,000 noncitizen children with a parent who is married to a US citizen could also potentially qualify for the same process, according to senior administration officials who briefed reporters on the proposal on condition of anonymity.

There is no requirement on how long the couple must have been married, and no one becomes eligible after Monday.

That means immigrants who reach that 10 year mark any time after June 17, 2024, will not qualify for the programme, according to the officials.

Senior administration officials said they anticipate the process will be open for applications by the end of the summer, and fees to apply have yet to be determined.

White House officials privately encouraged Democrats in the House, which is in recess this week, to travel back to Washington to attend the announcement.

The President will also announce new regulations that will allow certain DACA beneficiaries and other young immigrants to more easily qualify for long-established work visas. —*AP*

PHOTO: PIXABAY

Rupee jumps 13 paise to settle against dollar

MUMBAI, 18 JUNE

The rupee appreciated 13 paise to settle at 83.42 (provisional) against the US dollar on Tuesday, buoyed by fresh inflow of foreign capital and a firm trend in domestic equity markets, wherein benchmark indices scaled new peaks. Forex traders said reports of dollar selling by public sector banks supported the Indian currency. However, higher crude oil prices capped the gains in the local unit. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.52 and hit the intraday high of 83.39 against the greenback during the session. It finally settled at 83.42 (provisional) against the dollar, registering a gain of 13 paise from its previous close. On Friday, the rupee had settled 1 paisa lower at 83.55 against the US dollar. Forex markets were closed on Monday on account of Bakri Id. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading at 105.06, higher by 0.12 per cent. Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, declined 0.33 per cent to USD 83.97 per barrel.*—PTI*

Gold slips ₹50; silver jumps ₹400

NEW DELHI, 18 JUNE

Gold prices fell Rs 50 to Rs 72,350 per 10 grams in the national capital on Tuesday amid a fall in precious metal rates globally, according to HDFC Securities. However, silver jumped Rs 400 to Rs 91,300 per kg. Commodity markets were partially closed on Monday on account of Eid ul-adha. In the international markets, spot gold at Comex was last quoted at USD 2,319 per ounce, down USD 2 from the previous close. Meanwhile, silver was quoted higher at USD 29.35 per ounce. *—PTI*

eBikeGo to expand e-2-wheeler fleet to 1L units by FY26

MUMBAI, 18 JUNE

Electric vehicle rental services operator eBikeGo on Tuesday said it plans to expand its e-two-wheeler fleet to 1-lakh units by FY26 amid a rapidly increasing last-mile and e-commerce segment. The domestic last-mile delivery and e-commerce business is growing at 6.4 per cent as of the first quarter of 2024. As direct-to-consumer delivery becomes the need of the hour and a compulsory asset, the affordability of a fuel two-wheeler at the current price point raises a question. According to eBikeGo, the Hyperlocal delivery segment is expected to grow at a Compounded Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of approximately 16.14 per cent from 2024 to 2029, resulting in a projected market volume of USD 92.50 billion by 2029.*—PTI*

Vikram Solar bags order to supply 393.9 MWp modules

NEW DELHI, 18 JUNE

Solar energy solutions provider Vikram Solar on Tuesday said it bagged an order to supply 393.9 MWp solar modules for NLC India's solar project in Gujarat. According to a statement, Vikram Solar will supply 393.9 MWp module to NLC India Limited at GSECL's Solar Park (Stage 2) in Khavda, Gujarat. This order brings Vikram Solar's total PV module supply contract to the Khavda Solar Park to over 1 GW, the company said. Gyanesh Chaudhary, Chairman & Managing Director, Vikram Solar, said in the statement, "This purchase order not only signifies NLC's deep trust in our expertise but also affirms our steadfast commitment to excellence."*—PTI*

Markets continue record run as Sensex, Nifty climb

Benchmark Sensex closed above the 77,000 level for first time

MUMBAI, 18 JUNE

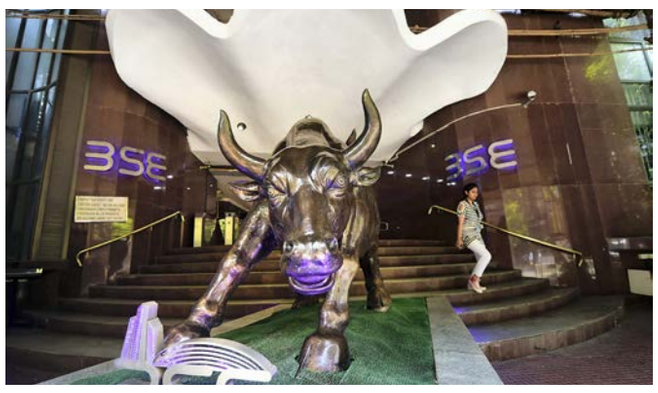
Benchmark Sensex closed above the 77,000 level for the first time, and broader Nifty scaled a fresh peak on Tuesday as key equity indices stayed on the record-breaking run powered by a rally in index majors ICICI Bank, HDFC Bank and Infosys.

Besides, renewed foreign fund inflows amid a firm trend in global equities boosted investor confidence, traders said.

In a range-bound session, Sensex and Nifty settled at their new closing all-time high levels amid intense demand for realty, consumer durable and utility stocks.

Rising for the third straight session, the 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 308.37 points or 0.40 per cent to settle at a new closing peak of 77,301.14. During the day, it jumped 374 points or 0.48 per cent to hit the fresh lifetime peak of 77,366.77.

As many as 2,167 stocks advanced while 1,836 declined and 147 remained unchanged



Rising for the fourth straight session, the 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 308.37 points *PHOTO: PTI*

on the BSE.

The NSE Nifty went up by 92.30 points or 0.39 per cent to hit a record closing high of 23,557.90 for the fourth straight session. It rallied 113.45 points or 0.48 per cent to hit the new all-time high of 23,579.05 during the day trade.

"The Indian market touched record highs again and is gradually expanding the gains achieved following the national election. It is responding positively to the upcoming budget, which is anticipated to strike a balance between growth and populism.

"Similarly, it is also taking cues from positive global market trends, with the US moving steadily towards the presidential election in November. Market volatility has decreased over the month, which is contributing to a short-term trend," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services.

Fitch Ratings on Tuesday raised India's growth forecast for the current fiscal to 7.2 per cent from 7 per cent projected in March, citing a recovery in consumer spending and increased investment.

Among the 30 Sensex companies, Power Grid, Wipro, ICICI Bank, Titan, Mahindra & Mahindra, Axis Bank, HDFC Bank, Infosys, JSW Steel and State Bank of India were the biggest gainers.

In contrast, Maruti, UltraTech Cement, Tata Steel, Tata Motors, ITC and Tata Consultancy Services were among the laggards.

"Indian equities are trading at an all-time high zone led by positive macros and US markets scaling to new highs. Further, 27 per cent growth in advance direct tax receipts for the Q1 FY25 supported the sentiments," Siddhartha Khemka, Head - Retail Research, Motilal Oswal Financial Services Ltd, said. *—PTI*

FOR FY25

Fitch raises India's growth forecast to 7.2 pc on investment

NEW DELHI, 18 JUNE

Fitch Ratings on Tuesday raised India's growth forecast for current fiscal to 7.2 per cent, from 7 per cent projected in March, citing a recovery in consumer spending and increased investment.

For the fiscal years 2025-26 and 2026-27, Fitch projected growth rates of 6.5 per cent and 6.2 per cent, respectively.

"We expect the Indian economy to expand by a strong 7.2 per cent in FY24/25 (an upward revision of 0.2 pp from the March GEO)," Fitch said in its global economic outlook report.Fitch's estimates are in line with that of RBI which earlier this month projected Indian economy to expand 7.2 per cent in the current fiscal on the back of improving rural demand and moderating inflation.Investment will continue to rise but more slowly than in recent quarters, while consumer spending will recover with elevated consumer confidence, it said.

Fitch said purchasing managers survey data point to continued growth at the start of the current financial year.

It said signs of the coming monsoon season being more normal should support growth and make inflation less volatile, though a recent heatwave poses a risk.

"We expect growth in later years to slow and approach our medium-term trend estimate," it said, adding growth will be driven by consumer spending and investment.

The Indian economy grew 8.2 per cent in the last fiscal (2023-24), with a 7.8 per cent expansion in March quarter.

Inflation, Fitch expects, will decline to 4.5 per cent by end 2024 and average 4.3 per cent in 2025 and 2026.

Fitch said it expects the RBI to cut policy interest rates by 25 basis points this year to 6.25 per cent. *—PTI*

Power ministry asks utilities to be on alert due to demand amid heatwave

NEW DELHI, 18 JUNE

The power ministry on Tuesday said it has asked all utilities "to maintain a high state of alert and minimise forced outages of equipment" amid heatwave pushing electricity demand, especially in the northern region where Monsoon is yet to arrive.

The country's northern region has been experiencing high electricity demand due to a prevailing heatwave since 17 May, 2024, the ministry said in a statement.

Despite these challenging conditions, the ministry said, the highest ever peak demand of 89 GW in the northern region was successfully met on 17 June, 2024.It was made possible by importing 25-30 per cent of the region's power requirement from neighbouring regions, it said.

"All utilities have been advised to maintain a high state of alert and minimise forced outages of equipment," the statement said.

According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD) forecast, heatwave conditions in North-West India are expected to abate from 20 June. In response to the increased electricity demand and to ensure adequate power availability across the country, the Ministry of Power has implemented a series of measures to meet the highest ever peak demand of 250 GW during the ongoing summer season.

The ministry has estimated that peak demand can touch a level of 260 GW during this season *PHOTO: PIXABAY*

The ministry has estimated that peak demand can touch a level of 260 GW during this season. The ministry has instructed power generating units to have minimum planned maintenance during this period.

Efforts are being made to minimise partial and forced outages to maximise the availability of generation capacity, it stated, adding that plants under long-term outage have been sensitised to revive their units to ensure maximum power generation.

All generating companies (GENCOs) have been advised to keep their plants in healthy condition to ensure full capacity availability for optimal operation of various generation sources, it stated. *—PTI*

INFOSYS BRINGS AI-SERVICES FOR BUSINESS GROWTH

NEW DELHI, 18 JUNE

IT giant Infosys on Tuesday announced the launch of Infosys Aster, a set of AI-powered marketing services that enhance brand experiences, efficiency, and effectiveness for business growth.

With more than 400 marketing assets, 50 plus partners, and more than 20 design studios, Infosys said Aster is accelerating experience, efficiency, and effectiveness for B2B and B2C marketers globally.

It drives AI-led transformation of marketing with integrated, real-time view across customers, brands and channels, enabling companies to increase ROI from marketing, it added.

Infosys Aster helps marketing organisations master the duality of marketing effectiveness and marketing efficiency to truly transform into customer-champions and growth-partners, said Satish H C, EVP and Co-head of Delivery, Infosys. *—PTI*

Fitch said purchasing managers survey data point to continued growth at the start of the current financial year *PHOTO: PTI*

HUDCO raises $200m from overseas lenders

MUMBAI, 18 JUNE

Housing and Urban Development Corporation (HUDCO) has raised USD 200 million (JPY 30 billion) in its maiden foray into the syndicated loan market, its arranger said on Tuesday.

The state-run body has raised the five-year money as part of its inaugural "social loan", Japan's Sumitomo Mitsui Banking Corporation (SMBC) said.

The deal, led by SMBC's Singapore branch, saw an oversubscription with a total of nine lenders, and was upsized from its original launch size of JPY 15 billion to JPY 30 billion after exercising the greenshoe option, an official statement said.

The inaugural social loan will enable further expansion of HUDCO's social housing platform to improve the quality of life for the Indian community and enhance infrastructure facilities in urban areas, the statement said.

SMBC acted as the sole mandated lead arranger, book runner and social loan coordinator.

- The deal, led by SMBC's Singapore branch, saw an oversubscription with a total of nine lenders, and was upsized from its original launch size of JPY 15 billion to JPY 30 billion

"We look forward to expanding our reach to the underserved communities and strengthening the local community's access to resources," Hiroyuki Mesaki, country head of SMBC India, said.

SMBC India's chief business officer Rakesh Garg said the financing sets new benchmarks and paves the way for more Indian companies to tap into the Japanese Yen loan markets.

HUDCO's chairman and managing director Sanjay Kulshreshta said the body anticipates a surge in demand for its services given the government's focus on infrastructure-led growth. *—PTI*

Housing rent growth moderate in top 7 cities: Anarock

NEW DELHI, 18 JUNE

Average monthly rent for residential properties has risen 2-4 per cent so far this quarter compared with the January-March period across seven major cities, according to Anarock.

Real estate consultant Anarock said that the growth in housing rent across the top seven cities -- Delhi-NCR, Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR), Chennai, Kolkata, Pune, Hyderabad and Bengaluru -- has moderated because of improvement in housing supply. The data is based on average rent for a 2-BHK flat of 1,000 square feet.

"Average residential rental prices across key markets in these cities saw a 2-4 per cent quarterly rise in Q2 (April-June) 2024 to date over the preceding quarter. The Q1 2024 saw rents in these markets rise by between 4-9 per cent quarterly against Q4 2023," the report said.

The data is based on the average rent for a 2-BHK flat of 1,000 square feet *PHOTO: PIXABAY*

The average rent for a standard 1,000 square feet 2-BHK apartment in Bengaluru's Whitefield rose by 4 per cent to Rs 35,000 per month in Q2 2024 to date from Rs 32,500 per month in January-March this year.

However, the rentals rose by 8 per cent during January-March this year compared with the preceding quarter.

Anarock data shows that the top 7 cities are set to deliver 5.31 lakh new units in 2024 as against 4.35 lakh units in the last year. This denotes a 22 per cent annual supply increase this year if delivery schedules remain on track.

As per the data, the average rents in Noida's Sector 150 rose by a mere 4 per cent to Rs 25,000 per month in the April-June quarter from Rs 24,000 per month in January-March 2024. *—PTI*

Google's Gemini now out for Android users in India

NEW DELHI, 18 JUNE

Google on Tuesday said its AI assistant Gemini is now available as an app for Android smartphone users in India with support for English, Hindi and eight other Indian languages.

For iPhone users, access to Gemini will be rolled out through the Google app over the next few weeks, according to a blog post by Amar Subramanya, Vice President, Engineering, Gemini Experiences.

"Gemini, your AI assistant from Google, has had an exciting first year in India... From students to developers and many other curious minds, people in India are embracing Gemini's capabilities to enhance their productivity, learning, and creativity in everyday life," Subramanya wrote.

Additionally, users of Gemini Advanced in India will now be able to access features of Gemini 1.5 Pro, Google's latest next-gen AI (Artificial Intellegence) model.

PHOTO: PTI

The expanded capacity of Gemini Advanced will allow users to upload multiple large documents and emails for quick summaries, feedback, and actionable insights.

"As always, privacy is a top priority. Gemini keeps your files private to you, and they're not used to train our models," Subramanya added.

Google said the Gemini feature will also be added in Google Messages on select devices.

The generative AI platform faced controversies earlier this year, over its "fascist Modi" responses, and anti-white bias. *—PTI*

2ND BIGGEST FOR KITKAT

India largest market for Nestle's Maggi

NEW DELHI, 18 JUNE

India has become the largest market for Nestle globally for its instant noodles and soup brand Maggi and the second largest for chocolate wafer brand KitKat, according to the latest annual report of its local subsidiary.

Besides, the India market with a high double-digit growth has become one of the fastest growing markets for Nestle, it added.

"Penetration, premiumisation and innovation, combined with disciplined resource allocation, have been key in driving business, making your company one of the fastest growing markets for Nestle globally," said Nestle India's annual report for 2023-24. Nestle, which sells its popular instant noodles under brand Maggi and prepared dishes and cooking aids here, sold over six billion servings of Maggi during FY24, "making India the largest Nestlé market for Maggi worldwide," it said.

The India market with a high double-digit growth has become one of the fastest growing markets for Nestle *PHOTO: PTI*

Nestle is expanding its play under brand Maggi and has launched Oats Noodle, Korean Noodles and various masala variants at an affordable Rs 10."The Prepared Dishes and Cooking Aids business recorded a strong growth momentum. This was aided by a balance of product mix, pricing and volume growth in Maggi noodles and Maggi Masala-ae-Magic, supported by strong consumer engagement and market presence with media campaigns and attractive consumer activations," it said.

In confectionary, Nestle India said it sold 4,200 million fingers of KitKat. The growth was fuelled by the launch of new products, expansion of the distribution network and innovative brand activations.

"KitKat has emerged as the star performer, by not only delivering strong growth but making Nestlé India the second largest market for the brand globally," it said.

"Strengthening this further, your company is poised to invest approximately Rs 7,500 crore between 2020 and 2025 to develop new capabilities and expand existing ones with a sharp focus on sustained growth and innovation," its Chairman & Managing Director Suresh Narayanan said while addressing shareholders in the report.

The company is focussing on innovations and in the past eight years, it has launched over 140 products. A significant portion of sales in 2023 was attributed to innovative products.

According to Narayanan, plant-based products present a significant opportunity for Nestle India, which has been operating here for 112 years. It is also expanding its presence and through RUrban journey its direct coverage has gone beyond two lakh villages. *—PTI*

EUROPEAN CHAMPIONSHIP 2024

France relies on its own goal to edge past resilient Austria

Mbappé sustained a broken nose and will need to wear a mask if he plays

DORTMUND, 18 JUNE

France kicked off their Euro 2024 campaign with a 1-0 win over Austria in Group D as a result of Max Wober's own goal. The Leeds United defender nodded past his goalkeeper when trying to deal with Kylian Mbappe's cross.

Kylian Mbappe will not need surgery but will wear a mask when he returns to action after the France captain suffered a broken nose in his team's 1-0 Euro 2024 win over Austria on Tuesday, the French Football Federation said. Mbappe's head violently collided with the shoulder of Austrian defender Kevin Danso as they competed for the ball in the air late in the Group D opener in Duesseldorf. The star striker left the pitch in the 90th minute as blood poured from his nose, with a source close to the player later saying it was broken.

Maximilian Wober of Austria looks disappointed after scoring an own-goal, Kylian Mbappé sustained a broken nose

PHOTO: X / @EURO2024

Philippe Diallo, president of the French Federation (FFF), told reporters that Mbappe would "not require an operation".

A statement published by the FFF confirmed the extent of the injury, saying Mbappe had undergone tests at a hospital in Duesseldorf before rejoining the France squad at their base in Paderborn, a two-hour drive to the east.

"A mask will be made which will allow (Mbappe) to contemplate a return to action after a treatment period," the FFF said.

However, it is unclear if that means Mbappe will be able to play in France's next game, against the Netherlands in Leipzig on Friday. France coach Didier Deschamps was not optimistic when he spoke to reporters after Monday's match, which was decided by a Maximilian Woeber own goal late in the first half. "He is in a bad way. He is not well. His nose is a mess, that's for sure. That is the black mark of the evening for us," Deschamps said of Mbappe.

—AP

Man City opens title defence at Chelsea

LONDON, 18 JUNE

Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola will come up against a familiar face in his team's opening match of its Premier League title defence.

City will start the season away at Chelsea, whose new manager is Enzo Maresca — an assistant to Guardiola at City in the 2022-23 season.

It's part of a tough start for City, which also hosts Arsenal and visits Newcastle away in the opening six games as the team begins its bid for a record-extending fifth straight English top-flight title.

The season will kick off on Aug. 16 when Manchester United hosts Fulham.

New Liverpool manager Arne Slot will travel to promoted Ipswich for his first game in charge in the early kickoff the following day.

Maresca left Leicester after leading the team back into the Premier League after just one season in the Championship, and his former club — which has yet to name a replacement for the coach — will host Tottenham in the Monday night game in the opening round.

Southampton, which won the Championship playoff final to clinch the third promotion spot, travels to Newcastle.

—AP

Pep Guardiola PHOTO: @PEPTEAM

PHOTO: PTI

Gautam Gambhir is set to be named India's coach soon

NEW DELHI, 18 JUNE

Former India opener Gautam Gambhir was on Tuesday interviewed by the BCCI's Cricket Advisory Committee (CAC) for the national team's head coach position. The interview took place over a Zoom call with both Gambhir and Malhotra attending it virtually. "Yes, Gambhir appeared for the interview with the CAC. One round of discussions happened today. There is another round expected tomorrow," a BCCI source told PTI. Gambhir is believed to be the only candidate who is in contention and the announcement of his name is a mere formality that could happen in the next 48 hours.—*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

GM Arjun Erigaisi wins Stepan Avagyan Memorial

DUBAI, 18 JUNE

Indian Grandmaster Arjun Erigaisi delivered yet another domineering performance to clinch the Stepan Avagyan Memorial 2024 crown in Jermuk, Armenia with a round to spare. The 20-year-old, India's highest-rated chess player, defeated Russian GM Volodar Murzin in 63 moves in the eighth and penultimate round to move to six points with four wins and as many draws. He now has an unassailable lead of 1.5 points over three players tied for second spot in a strong 10-player field. The victory also helped Arjun jump to a career-high live rating of No. 4 as he has so far added 9 points from the eight rounds to reach a total of 2779.9 ELO points.—*PTI*

'Copped a lot': Scandal Warner can't shake

NORTH SOUND, 18 JUNE

David Warner has conceded he will never be able to escape his role in the sandpaper scandal of 2018 and will bow out of international cricket at the end of the T20 World Cup 2024 happy he's "not going to cop it anymore".

Warner, who retired from the Test and ODI format earlier this year, will walk into international sunset at the end of the ongoing showpiece in the USA and West Indies.

Warner PHOTO: @DAVIDWARNER31

The 37-year-old Warner served a one-year ban by Cricket Australia for his involvement in the 2018 sandpaper gate scandal but enjoyed plenty of success since his return to the national side. "Coming back since 2018 I've probably ... been the only one that's ever copped a lot of flak," Warner told News Corp."My back was always up against the wall when I came back, and I knew that. —*PTI*

Little hectic but we're ready: Rohit

BRIDGETOWN, 18 JUNE

India captain Rohit Sharma conceded that the T20 World Cup's Super 8 stage is going to be a "little hectic" but his players are prepared for the grind as there is "real keenness" among them to do "something special".

India will open their Super 8 campaign against Afghanistan on June 20, followed by games against Bangladesh (June 22, Antigua) and Australia (June 24, St Lucia).

Rohit Sharma PHOTO: X / @ROHITSHARMA45

"Once we play our first game, we are going to play the next two in a span of 3 or 4 days," Rohit said in a video uploaded by the BCCI.

"It is going to be a little hectic but we are used to all of this. We travel and play a lot so that is never going to be an excuse," the 37-year-old added.

The Indian team had an extended practice session on Monday with senior players like Virat Kohli and Rohit spending more than usual time in the nets.

—*PTI*

USA will take on South Africa PHOTO: X / @T20WORLDCUP

Focus on SA batters in Super 8 clash against USA

NORTH SOUND, 18 JUNE

South Africa will have no room for error as their world-class batters will be keen to flex their muscles against a spirited USA in their opening Super Eight match of the T20 World Cup here on Wednesday.

The Proteas have remained unbeaten in the tournament so far with their bowlers doing the heavy lifting in all four games.

Playing three games on the challenging New York tracks, and one in Kingstown, South Africa have not crossed the 120-run mark even once.

Although their batting performance is not a reflection of the team which possesses some big hitters like Quinton de Kock, Henriech Klassen, Tristan Stubbs, and David Miller.

But still, the top order of De Kock, Reeze Hendricks, and captain Aiden Markram might feel the pressure to perform.

South Africa survived by a run against Nepal in their previous game and with the likes of defending champions England and hosts West Indies also in Group 2, the Proteas can ill afford to let up against USA. They would like to start the Super Eight on a winning note.

Ahead of the World Cup, South Africa's biggest concern was the woeful form of Anrich Nortje, but the star pacer has turned it around with some scintillating display in the group stage and is currently the joint second leading wicket-taker with nine scalps.

Nortje and fellow pacer Ottneil Baartman, have formed a formidable pair, while Marco Jansen and Kagiso Rabada will also be eager to trouble the inexperienced USA batters.

The match starts at 8 PM IST. —*PTI*

PARIS OLYMPICS

Shubhankar Sharma and Gaganjeet Bhullar qualified

DUBAI, 18 JUNE

India's number one male golfers Shubhankar Sharma and Gaganjeet Bhullar will be teeing off for the country at the prestigious Golf National course in Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines, come the Paris 2024 Olympic Games.

This was confirmed after the International Golf Federation revealed its Olympic qualification list of 60 men and women golfers for the Olympic Golf tournament, scheduled from August 1-4.Both Sharma and Bhullar will make their Olympic debuts.

Sharma whose Official World Golf Ranking (OWGR) is 222, qualified with an Olympic rank of 48.Bhullar qualified with an Olympic rank of 54.Aditi Ashok (24th) and Diksha Dagar (40th) are likely to cut the women's when the final list is announced on June 24.

The 27-year-old Sharma is a two-time winner on the DP World Tour (formerly the European Tour) and has eight career titles to his name.He will be seen in action next at the KLM Open in Amsterdam and the Italian Open this month, which are both parts of the DP World Tour.Sharing his thoughts on the moment, Sharma said, "It's a dream come true obviously. I have been preparing for this day for a while now, and am planning my schedule for the European Tour, accordingly."

Shubhankar Sharma and Prithviraj Tondaiman PHOTO: PTI

We have a very good and experienced team in Gaganjeet, Aditi, Diksha, and self. We have depth and experience behind us. All are playing solid golf at the moment, on our respective tours too, and that's a good sign."If Olympic week turns our way, any medal is possible for both men's and women's teams. Personally speaking, my game is trending in the right direction and I am keyed up to deliver."

Prithviraj Tondaiman gets the nod

Senior trap shooter Prithviraj Tondaiman will spearhead the Indian shotgun team in the upcoming Paris Olympics as the national shooting federation Tuesday named a five-member squad for the mega event, with all of them appearing in their maiden games.

The Paris Games will be held from July 26 to August 11.

Tondaiman has cut the men's trap, while Rajeshwari Kumari will aim in the women's trap event.

Anantjeet Singh Naruka will be India's sole men's skeet shooter while Raiza Dhillon and Maheshwari Chauhan in women's skeet complete the five quota places that the shotgun squad had earned in the qualification cycle.

Maheshwari and Anantjeet will also feature as the sole Indian pair in the skeet mixed team event, which is making a debut at the Paris Games. Incidentally, all five named will also be competing in their first Olympic Games.

The National Rifle Association of India's (NRAI) secretary general Kr. Sultan Singh said "There was intense competition for places and things could have changed in case some shooters medalled at the recently concluded Lonato World Cup. —*PTI*

Sainz reveals contract offers from every team

DUBAI, 18 JUNE

Carlos Sainz is perhaps one of the most watched racers on the grid now as the talented Spanish Ferrari driver is on the lookout for his next Formula One team. The former McLaren man is currently amidst his final season as a driver for the Scuderia as he will be replaced by Lewis Hamilton in the 2025 season.

Following weeks of speculation, Sainz has now confirmed that he has an offer from every team that does not have a confirmed driver line-up in the coming season.

"There isn't one [option]. There are various, I won't lie to you. All the teams that haven't signed both their drivers for next year, I'm on their list. They have offered me a contract, and I could sign with them tomorrow. But I won't sign tomorrow, I will be calm and make a decision soon," said the Ferrari driver on the Spanish TV Show, 'El Hormiguero.' —*AP*

Carlos Sainz PHOTO:@CARLOS-

WOMEN'S 2ND ODI

India eye runs from top-order batters

BENGALURU, 18 JUNE

India will expect their top-order batters to produce a tidier effort against South Africa in the second women's ODI here on Wednesday in their quest for an unassailable 2-0 lead in the three-match series.

India has a 1-0 lead in their hand, courtesy of a 143-run win in the first game but the win, as comprehensive as it was, also left some questions unanswered.

The home side rode on Smriti Mandhana's hundred and a fine spell by spinners to outclass South Africa, but it was not enough to paper over some wide cracks in the batting department.

The most glaring of them is the continued underwhelming ODI outings of opener Shafali Verma. Her last one-day fifty came in 2022, an unbeaten 71, against Sri Lanka at Pallekele.

In the last six matches, the opener's scoresheet reads: 1, 8, 0, 4, 1, 7. The 20-year-old will require a substantial score sooner than later to cling on to her spot.

India has a 1-0 lead in their hand PHOTO: PTI

Skipper Harmanpreet Kaur would also like to have a big score under her belt after notching up 14, 9, 5, 3, and 10 in her last five outings.

Top-order batter Jemimah Rodrigues, who returned from a back injury that forced her to sit out of the T20I series against Bangladesh, too failed to impress. Rodrigues would like to recapture her 2023 form where she made a couple of 80s and came close to scoring her maiden ODI hundred.

All of them can take a cue from vice-captain Mandhana, whose sixth ODI hundred stood out for its studiousness.

Of course, the graceful left-hander has been in good touch in ODIs, as her last 20 innings dating back to February 2022 have fetched seven fifties and two centuries and was dismissed below 10 only thrice.

But returning to the one-day format after playing a string of T20s in the last four months might have been tough for her, and it became all the more difficult because she also had to bail out the team from a precarious 99 for five against the Proteas.

However, Mandhana braved those tests, showing wonderful adaptation of skills and mindset. Hopefully, her colleagues in the top order will contribute more runs as she will not have to repeat that firefighting act. **Match starts at 1.30 PM** —*PTI*

- India will expect their top-order batters to produce a tidier effort against South Africa in the second women's ODI here on Wednesday in their quest for an unassailable 2-0 lead in the three-match series.

Williamson uncertain about his future

TAROUBA, 18 JUNE

New Zealand will require some time to regroup after their shock early exit from the T20 World Cup, said skipper Kane Williamson, who was non-committal regarding his return for the 2026 edition of the marquee event.

An all-format player who is considered one of the greats of modern-day cricket, Williamson has been the Blackcaps batting mainstay for over a decade.

New Zealand reached three finals with Williamson in the side -- the 2015 and 2019 ODI World Cups, the 2021 T20 World Cup, and the inaugural World Test Championship final, which they won. Williamson led the BlackCaps in three of those four tournaments.

"When asked if he'd return for the 2026 edition, Williamson said: "Oh, I don't know." New Zealand's campaign ended with a facile seven-wicket win over minnows Papua New Guinea. They finished outside of the semifinals for the first time in 10 years.

Kane Williamson PHOTO: PTI

Pace spearhead Trent Boult has already confirmed that the ongoing T20 World Cup was his last.

"There's a bit of time between now and then, so it's regrouping as a side. And yeah, we've sort of got red-ball cricket over the next year.

"So yeah, it's back into some international other formats, and yeah, see where things land," he added.

On New Zealand's short campaign at the T20 World Cup, the 34-year-old said "I think no matter what happens, you always want to do more.

—*PTI*

Pooran's explosive 98 takes WI to 104-run win

GROS ISLET, 18 JUNE

Nicholas Pooran displayed his incredible six-hitting prowess as West Indies geared up for the Super 8 with a dominating 104-run win over Afghanistan in their final Group C match of the T20 World Cup here. With both teams assured of a Super 8 berth, it was the two-time champions who displayed their batting might, amassing a formidable 218 for five, with Pooran going on a six-hitting spree during his 53-ball 98. It was the highest total for the West Indies in T20 World Cups. In reply, Afghanistan succumbed to scoreboard pressure, managing just 114 in 16.2 overs.

—*PTI*